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# CITIES, MONUMENTS AND OBJECTS IN THE ROMAN AND BYZANTINE LEVANT

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Edited by  
**Walid Atrash, Andrew Overman  
and Peter Gendelman**





# **Cities, Monuments and Objects in the Roman and Byzantine Levant**

Studies in Honour of Gabi Mazor

Edited by

Walid Atrash, Andrew Overman  
and Peter Gendelman

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## Gabi Mazor: An Appreciation

Nanette Goldman\*

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It is my honor to represent the hundreds of students of archaeology who have been inspired and trained by Gabi Mazor. I speak with firsthand knowledge. I am one of them. A philologist by trade, I became involved with the archaeological excavations at Omrit, Israel, under the direction of my Macalester colleague Andy Overman. There in the field at Omrit I first encountered Gabi, in the early 2000s. I didn't know much about him, but he cut a dashing figure in his characteristic black t-shirt and black jeans, climbing carefully around the excavation squares and elements, scrutinizing the emerging pattern of physical evidence, rolling pottery sherds between his fingers. What struck me, and intimidated me, was his ability to immediately visualize what the remains were saying. It was something I wanted to sit back and behold. What is this gift? How do I learn from it? So I watched in curiosity, just a neophyte volunteer in archaeology. Little did I know how much Gabi would help me and so many others understand the ancient world.

As Gabi worked with our excavations over the years, one thing became very clear; Gabi thrived on the curiosity of students, of any age. Not only did he advise and train summer excavation volunteers, but in other parts of the year he generously traveled with our Macalester students to ancient sites throughout the Mediterranean. First in Turkey in 2006 and then in Rome in 2010 Gabi joined our classes of 20 students enrolled in courses investigating the ancient remains. Without notes, books, or slides he spontaneously spoke on any site, helping students make sense of what they saw, making correlations with other places they had visited, with the history they had studied. More times than I can count I have watched him explain to a rapt audience of students the significance of free standing city gates in ancient Roman cities, the importance of water systems, the process of installing mosaics. He delighted in challenging students to search for connections, to see the interrelatedness of the Roman world. He asked them to think beyond what they thought they knew, to look for hidden evidence. Students flocked to him for his advice and approval.

Closer to home I have seen him joyfully and carefully lead throngs of students through the beautiful site of Bet She'an, clearly explicating the remains, demonstrating the processes of excavation, reconstruction and restoration. Visits to Bet She'an have been a turning point in understanding archaeology for all students who have experienced his infinite expertise and enthusiasm teaching the site.

That impulse to educate extends far beyond the discipline of archaeology. Gabi routinely provides mentorship to American students seeking curatorial or conservation internships in Israeli museums.

He has countless times opened up his home to American visitors to converse with them about everything Israeli, from history to culture to politics, and all points in between. He distills vast amounts of information for those seeking knowledge about the region, young and old, liberal and conservative. Whether talking to a group of college students or a group of retirees his joy at illuminating the history of Israel is palpable and his knowledge and propensity to synthesize immense.

Gabi has served as not only a disciplined scientist but a willing ambassador of Israeli archaeology and history. Over the years our students have absorbed his infectious joy in investigating new sites, his incisive interpretation of fresh finds emerging from the dirt, his tenacious inquiry, his brilliant synthesis and his sense of privilege to be working with young minds. He deserves our deepest appreciation. In consort with hundreds of students I express my eternal gratitude for the education I received from our beloved Gabi Mazor. Thank you for teaching me the love of archaeology. Thank you for the love of archaeology you have instilled in our students. May there be many more!

# Back to Bet She'an: Results of the 2019–2020 Fieldwork of the German-Israeli

## Tell Izṭabba Excavation Project<sup>1</sup>

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*The renewed excavations at Tell Izṭabba by the joint German-Israeli team yielded important new results for increasing our knowledge concerning the settlement history of the site. Despite the partial exposure of pre-Hellenistic remains, our excavations indicate that the site was considerably occupied during the Early Bronze Age III (and possibly in earlier stages of that period). After which, the focus has shifted to Tel Bet She'an. The next substantial occupation of the site occurred only in the second quarter of the 2nd century BC, when Nysa-Scythopolis was founded under Seleucid hegemony. Our excavations suggest that in this part of the mound (Tell Izṭabba, East), the Hellenistic settlement occupied the upper part of the mound and did not reach the lower northern terraces. It was founded as a well-planned regular settlement with lavish courtyard houses made of stone and mudbricks adorned (in cases) with painted stucco. This short-lived settlement was violently destroyed by the Hasmoneans by the end of the 2nd century, probably in 108/107 BC. After the Hasmonean destruction, a monumental structure likely dated to the 2nd/3rd century AD was founded. It needs to be investigated further whether the architectural spolia incorporated in W470 of the Byzantine 'Podium Building', originate from the Roman structure whose remains are seen beneath the latter's walls. They also could stem from the Roman civic centre at the foot of Tel Bet She'an. It is now clear that before the construction of the Byzantine city walls of Scythopolis that crossed Tell Izṭabba, the site had already been reoccupied in the Roman period, apparently to quite a limited extent that needs to be further explored, as does the function of the 'Podium Building'. Nevertheless, the new results provide a multi-faceted picture of the site's history, especially after its Hasmonean destruction. In the future we hope to uncover remains of public structures dated to the Seleucid occupational stage, which have yet to be found at the site. We are also continuing archaeobotanical and archeozoological analyses in order to better understand the economic sustainability of the inhabitants of this Near Eastern Hellenistic settlement.*

KEYWORDS: TELL IZṬABBA; NYSA-SCYTHOPOLIS; BET SHE'AN; EARLY BRONZE AGE; HELLENISTIC SETTLEMENT; DECAPOLIS.

### Introduction

This article deals with the results of the three fieldwork seasons of the German-Israeli Excavation Project at Tell Izṭabba, which is the location of the Seleucid-period founded town of Nysa (Scythopolis). The first and second seasons were carried out in the months of February and September 2019, and the third season was carried out during February 2020. During these campaigns, four excavation areas were investigated (A–D) revealing occupation layers dating to the Early Bronze, Hellenistic, and Byzantine periods. The excavations at Tell Izṭabba shed new light on the settlement history of the site and the region during the relevant periods.

The site of Bet She'an and the Bet She'an Valley are well known for their long occupational history. Located on a crossroads in the northern Jordan valley, on the banks of Nahal Harod, Bet She'an has demonstrated dense occupation from proto-historical to modern times. Tell Izṭabba consists of three hillocks located immediately to

the north of Tel Bet She'an beyond Nahal Harod (Figure 1). Excavations at the site unearthed settlement remains dated to the Early Bronze, Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. The Hellenistic settlement at Tell Izṭabba, which is the focus of this excavations project, was founded in the beginning of the 2nd century BC, most likely by Antiochos IV (175–164 BC) who refounded the Ptolemaic town of Scythopolis as a Seleucid settlement on Tell Izṭabba and renamed it Nysa (Lichtenberger 2008).

The first systematic exploration of Tell Izṭabba was carried out by Nehemiah Tzori in the 1950s. He reported Hellenistic period remains, including buildings, cisterns, architectural decoration and imported pottery vessels, such as Rhodian Amphorae (Tzori 1962: 152, Pls. 15, 2–4, 16, 1). A small rescue excavation was undertaken in 1977 in two squares close to the mound's southeastern edge by Vassilios Tzaferis. His excavation revealed Roman and Byzantine period architectural remains, which made use of earlier architectural decoration, as well as Hellenistic period building remains that yielded a considerable

<sup>1</sup> It is our pleasure to dedicate this paper to the Gaby Mazor as a token of our appreciation to his academic endeavor and continuant study of greater Bet She'an. The German-Israeli Tell Izṭabba Excavation Project discussed in this paper forms part of a German-Israeli research project 'Tell Izṭabba (Nysa-Scythopolis): High-resolution Hellenistic Settlement Archaeology and the Reassessment of the Formation of the Decapolis', mainly funded by the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development (GIF Regular Program [grant I-150-108.7-2017]), to which we are grateful. The project was licensed by the Israel Antiquities Authority (G-70/2019; G-17/2020) and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (A-014/19; A-020/20).



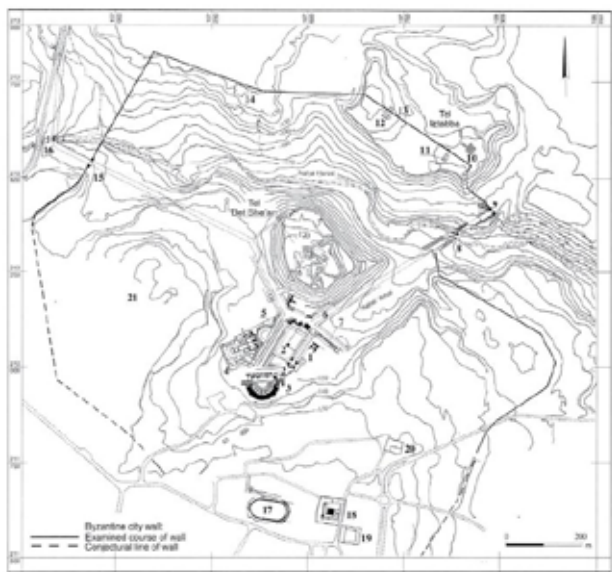


Figure 1. Map of ancient Beth She'an (Israel Antiquities Authority, 1998).

number of stamped Rhodian Amphorae dated to the 2nd century BC (Landau and Tzaferis 1979). During the 1980s and 1990s, large scale excavations took place at the site directed by Rachel Bar-Nathan and Gabriel Mazor on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) as part of the 'Bet She'an Excavation Project'. Substantial Hellenistic period remains were uncovered mainly in Areas W and Z on the easternmost spur of Tell Iztabba

(East), while further to the west and north such remains were also found, either less well-preserved due to erosion (Area H) or underneath later building remains (Areas M and T). Area W revealed parts of a Hellenistic residential quarter, intersected by two streets, with two phases of pavement. The houses were of the courtyard type, with rooms arranged around an open court and built of mudbrick walls decorated with colored and molded stucco on a foundation of basalt fieldstones. Interior floors were of beaten earth. The entire quarter was destroyed in a huge conflagration that, based on the finds, was dated to the end of the 2nd century BC, probably in 108–107 BC in the context of John Hyrcanus' campaign against pagan cities (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13: 280). The quarter was not resettled until the Roman period (Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1993: 51; Mazor and Atrash 2017: 86–87; 2018: 3–5; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33–34). Area Z was opened close to Tzaferis' previous excavation (Landau and Tzaferis 1979). Parts of a Hellenistic structure were unearthed, dated to the 2nd century BC, with two architectural phases. The walls were constructed of basalt fieldstone, large mudbrick, and *nari*-limestone orthostates. The spolia used in the walls of the later-period construction were initially attributed to this Hellenistic period structure. The characteristics and the interpretation of this Hellenistic period structure as the source for the architectural decoration led to the conclusion that it was a monumental public building from the Hellenistic period (Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1993, 50–51; Mazor and Atrash



Figure 2. Interpreted map of geodetic data (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

2017: 88; 2018: 6; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33). All these excavations have been published in a preliminary form.<sup>2</sup>

The aims of the current excavation project are to better understand the settlement history, urban fabric and material culture of a 2nd century BC Seleucid-founded town in the Near East and understanding its sustainability and economic background. By doing so, we hope to gain

thoughtful insights on the formative stages of the cities of the Decapolis and the Seleucid settlement dynamics in the Decapolis region.

### The Results of the 2019–2020 Seasons

The first campaign carried out in February 2019 was dedicated to a survey and a geophysical prospection of the site. While the survey yielded pottery of the Early Bronze Age, Hellenistic and Byzantine periods, the geo-magnetic

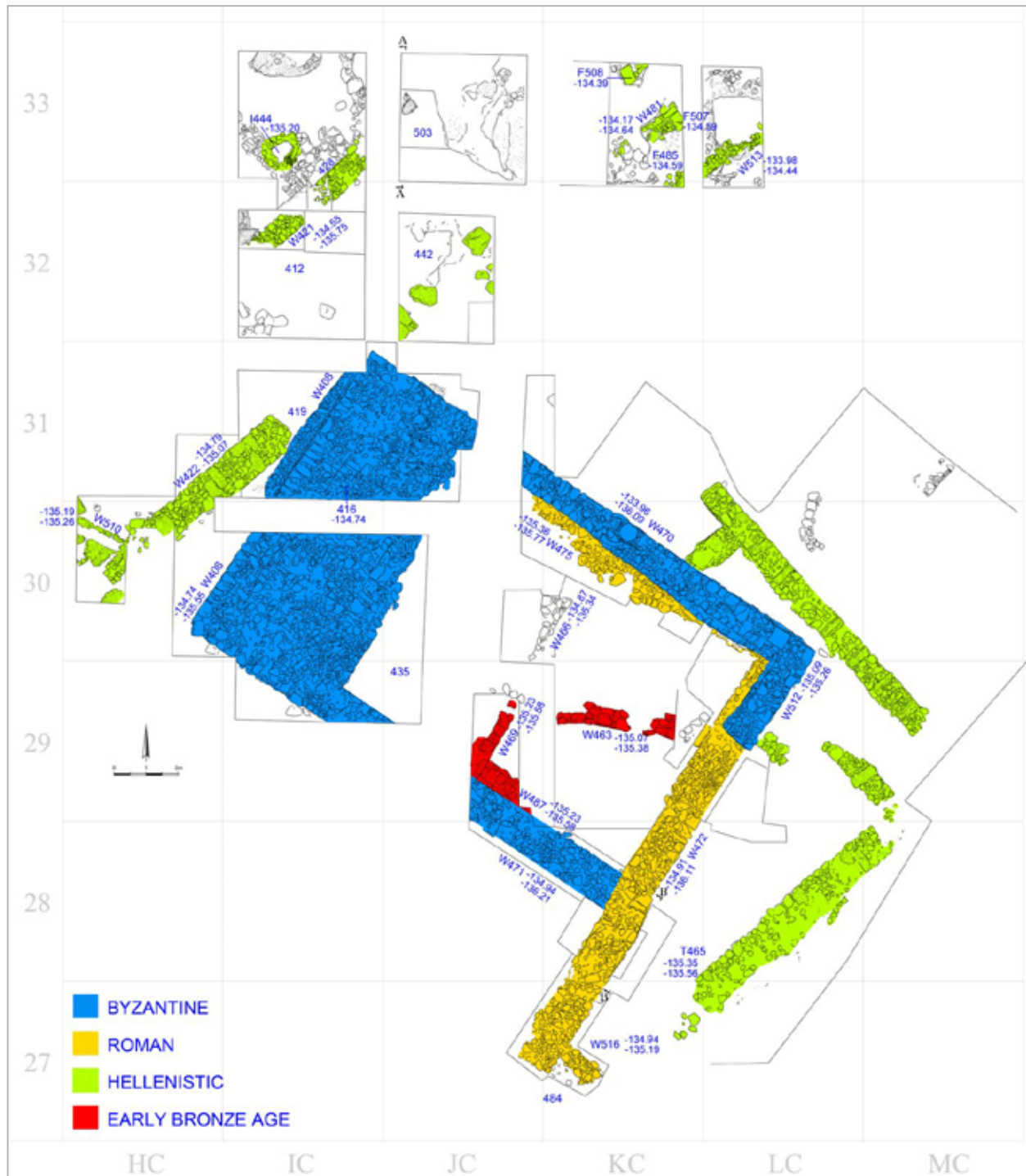


Figure 3. Plan of Area D (German-Israeli Tell Iẓṭabba Excavation Project).

<sup>2</sup> One of the houses discovered in the IAA's Area W excavation was the subject of an MA. thesis; see Sandhaus 2014; see also Mazor 2008.



survey showed that Tell İztābba is covered with structures that were laid out according to a regular plan (Figure 2). The regularity however fits into the natural topography. It has been previously assumed that the plan of the Hellenistic settlement followed an orthogonal grid. Our investigations showed however that this is only partly true, and that the natural topography has a considerable impact on the towns' infrastructural layout (Lichtenberger, Meyer and Tal 2020). This kind of urban planning stands in a local tradition and underlines that not a thoroughly orthogonal plan was implemented upon the foundation.

Following these surveys, soundings began in four excavation areas; A – C, and later D, unearthing settlement remains dating from the Early Bronze Age I–III, the Hellenistic period, the Roman period, and the Byzantine period (Ebeling *et al.* 2020; 2021).

### The Early Bronze Age

Occupation layers dated to the Early Bronze Age were unearthed in Areas C and D and appear to be the earliest settlement remains at Tell İztābba. In Area C, a single stone-built curved wall was encountered immediately below the remains of a Hellenistic structure (see below). Wall 330 consists of two rows of small, medium, and large fieldstones, built along a N–S axis. No floor level was noticed; however, the fill around it (L328, L329) contained many pottery sherds consisting mainly of holemouth jars and other storage vessels, including red burnished and Bet Yerah (Khirbet Kerak) ware, typical of the Early Bronze Age III (cf., e.g., Amiran 1970).

In Area D, the Early Bronze Age remains consisted of mudbrick walls which may have belonged to a single structure (Figure 3). However, their preservation and irregular alignment prohibits the reconstruction of a coherent plan. Nevertheless, irregular structures are not uncommon in Early Bronze Age sites in the region (cf., Braun 1989; Prag 1991). Wall 463 was built of two rows of mudbricks, c. 50cm thick, along an E–W axis. This curvilinear wall was preserved to a length of c. 3.7m and exposed three courses high (-135.07/-135.38m). In the eastern part of its northern face, the wall is abutted by two mudbricks, which seem to represent a bench. Wall 463 adjoins W469 from the west. The latter was built of two rows of mudbricks, c. 50m thick, along a NW–SE axis. It was exposed to a length of c. 2.5m, two courses high (-135.49/-135.66m). This wall is abutted by W487, another mudbrick wall, whose southern face is cut by W471 (see below). Wall 487 also seems to have been constructed of two rows of mudbricks, c. 60m thick, along a NE–SW axis; however, its original thickness might have been greater. The wall was exposed to a length of 1.5m, one course high (-135.49/-135.66m). The pottery associated with these architectural remains dates from the Early Bronze Age Ib–III; therefore, it is possible that W463, and W469 and W487 belong to two different architectural phases.



Figure 4. Photo of the L465, looking west (German-Israeli Tell İztābba Excavation Project).

Some 4m south-east of W463, a simple shallow pit burial (-135.35/-135.56m) was found containing the articulated remains of a female aged c. 15–20 years old (T465).<sup>3</sup> The individual was laid in an extended supine position on an E–W axis (head in the west, Figure 4). No burial offerings were found in the grave; however, a single mudbrick, similar to those used in the above-mentioned walls, had been placed over the pelvic area suggesting the grave should be dated to the Early Bronze Age (Ebeling *et al.* 2021). A burial cave, which may be dated to the Early Bronze Age was partly exposed in Area A. A corridor, hewn in the bedrock, 3.5m long and 60cm wide, was uncovered. This corridor is most likely the *dromos* of a Bronze Age burial cave which seems to have been robbed as the *dromos* (L106) was found filled with material from later periods and the burial chamber does not appear to be sealed. Similar breached burial caves were noted in the immediate vicinity, as well as in other areas of the tell (Horowitz and Atrash 2016; Oren 1973).

### The Hellenistic Period

Domestic architectural remains dated to the 2nd century BC were unearthed in Areas B, C, and D. In Area B, part of a residential structure, or structures, consisting of four rooms and a courtyard were unearthed (Figure 5). Three rooms separated by an adjoining wall (W204) running NW–SW were found in the northern part of the excavation area. W204 (-137.86/-138.62m) was exposed to a length of

<sup>3</sup> Skeletal remains were studied by Yossi Nagar (IAA) to whom we are indebted.

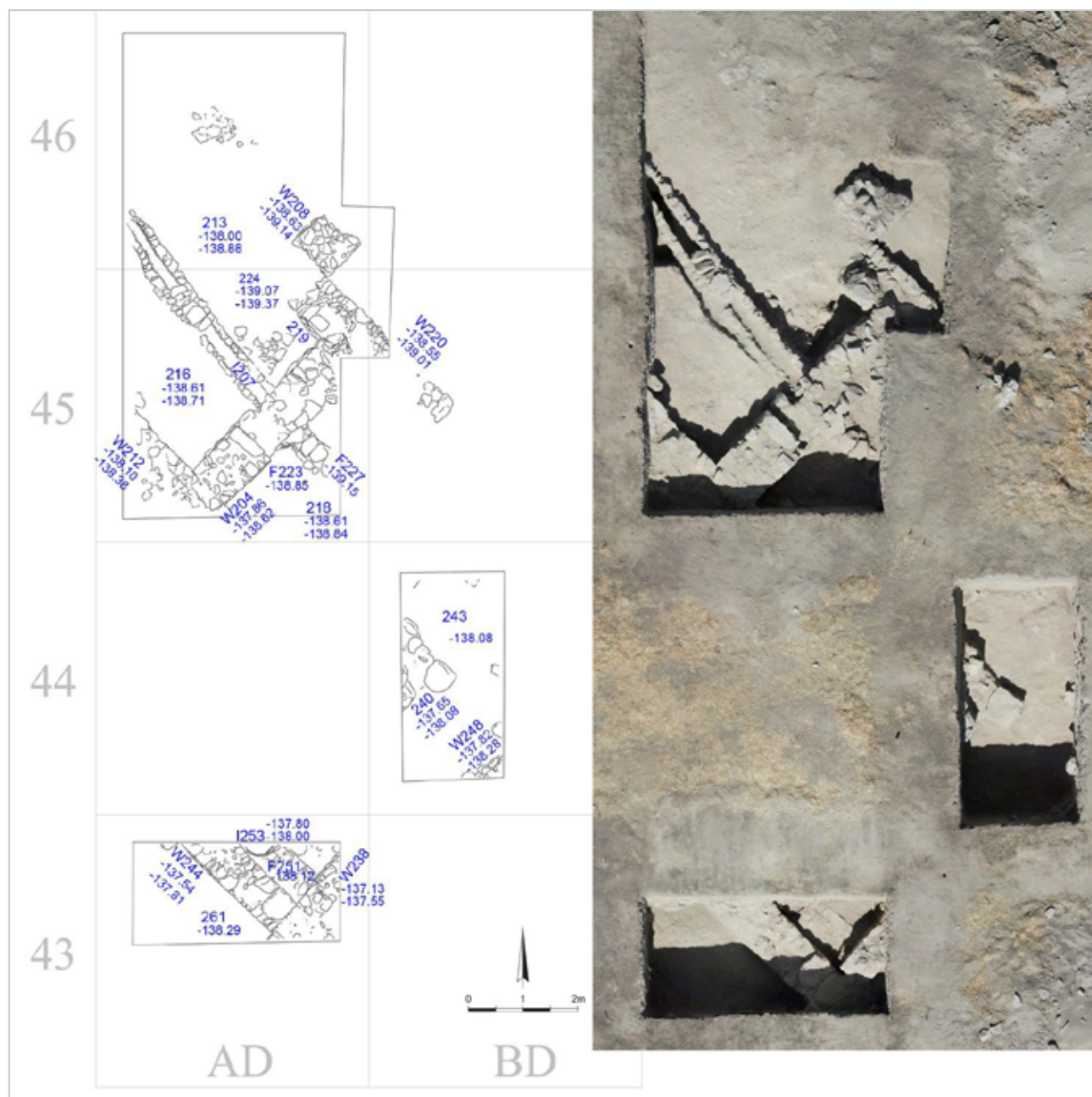


Figure 5. Plan and Orthophoto of Area B (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

c. 5m and is abutted by W220 at the north-eastern end, and by W212 at its south-western end. North of the corner of W220, a small ‘pier’ of medium-sized basalt fieldstones (W208) was preserved. Its connection to the structure is yet unclear. The northern limits of this room were eroded down the slope, however to the south-east, the continuation of W212 was found together with an opening in the south-western part of W204, giving access from one room to another. The walls were constructed of medium-sized roughly dressed basalt fieldstones, intersected at times by massive rectangular limestone and mudbrick orthostates, often set vertically next to openings (cf., Atrash 2016; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33). In both rooms, remains of mudbrick detritus were noted, suggesting a mudbrick superstructure. Some of the building’s walls were probably covered by red, yellow and black colored stucco, as is evident from many fragments

we have found. These can be assigned to the ‘first Pompeian’ or ‘Masonry’ style, typical of the Hellenistic period and the Hellenistic East (Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1993: 51; Ling 1991: 12–99; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33; and for nearby comparanda Cohen 2013: 9 and esp., Tal and Reshef 2017: 28–30, Pl. I). In addition to that, a patch of mortar (stucco base?) covered the southern face of W204 close to the entrance. In both rooms, no floor was preserved, but the dense accumulation of pottery in Loci 216 and 223 suggests walk-on levels of earthen floors. Patches of fallen mudbricks and charcoal indicate a violent destruction. A channel constructed of small fieldstones set in mud and coated with thin lime plaster was found underneath the area’s occupation level and the opening between the rooms (Figure 6). Its cover stones were only partially preserved, and it was found filled with earth. Given its level and construction, it served as part of the





Figure 6. Photo of sewage channel (I207) in Area B, from north-west (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

sewage system of the building (or insula), draining sewer downhill along the slope.<sup>4</sup> During the investigation of the wall foundations, another structure of medium-sized basalt fieldstones was encountered underneath the channel. Its function remains unclear. The fill underneath the floor of the sewage channel (L219) included colored stucco fragments and Hellenistic pottery.

To the south of these remains (see Figure 5), two similarly constructed walls (W238 and W244) forming two more rooms were unearthened, presumably belonging to the same structure. An entrance was set into W244 next to W238's abutment. Patches of fallen mudbrick and charcoal seem to indicate a similar violent end. In the south-western room, no floor could be discerned, but a dense concentration of pottery, bones and snail shells (L261) suggests a living surface (-138.29m). The bones in particular suggest that the room's function was related to food production. The floor on the northern side of the entrance was paved with smoothed basalt slabs (F251). On this pavement, an oven (I253) was set, close to the northern face of W244.<sup>5</sup> The oven is round and built of clay fired at a low temperature. It was found filled with ashes. Both the paved floor and the oven (as well as the absence of plaster

and stucco fragments from L245), indicate an unroofed space, probably an inner courtyard.

Another part of a large domestic structure consisting of at least four rooms was unearthened in Area C (Figure 7). It was built on terraces along the area's natural slope that descend towards the west. The structure's eastern and perhaps also southern parts were severely eroded. In the western part of the excavation area, what may have been the closing exterior wall of the structure was unearthened. This wall, W307, measured 60cm thick and was built along a NW–SE axis of roughly cut small- to medium and large-sized basalt fieldstones and ashlar-like sun-dried light mudbrick blocks, which were wrongfully interpreted as limestones set on both sides of doorways (Figures 7–8; cf., Atrash 2016; Mazor and Atrash 2017). Wall 307 was preserved c. 2.5m high, of which c. 1.5m constitutes its foundations. Mudbrick detritus found around the walls of the structure indicates that the upper courses of (at least some of) the structure's walls were constructed of sundried mudbricks. The wall was exposed to a length of some 13.5m, and it extends further north beyond the excavated area. At least three rooms are bounded by this wall. The northernmost unit, i.e., Room 1, was only partially preserved as its northern part seems to have been robbed in antiquity. A line of sherds found on an earth floor (L342) seems to indicate the robbers' trench of W307. The room is bounded from the south-east by W317, which abuts W307 from the north-west. Wall 317 was exposed to a length of c. 2.75m and may extend further north at a greater depth. The upper courses of this wall were robbed, evident by a robber's trench appearing in the section above it. To the south-east of Rooms 1, 2 was unearthened representing the best-preserved unit in the complex. Besides W307 and W317, Room 2 is also bounded by W318 from the northeast and by W308 from the southeast, the latter adjoining W307. Inside the room, a debris layer (L314) filled with broken ceramic vessels, ashes, and pieces of colored and molded stucco was unearthened indicating the violent destruction of the structure (cf. Ashkenazi *et al.* 2021). Traces of this destruction layer were also noted beyond the limits of Room 2 to the south-west and perhaps also to the north and north-east (L354). Wall 308 also served as a partition wall with another smaller room found further south-east, Room 3. This unit is also bounded by W340 from the south-east, which may represent the southernmost exterior wall of the structure. Unlike Rooms 1 and 2, Room 3 seems to have been built at a higher elevation, c. 1m above the floor of the previous units. The higher elevation of this room, whose floor was not preserved, is indicated by the fact that the lowest elevation of W340 is at least 50cm above that of W308. Furthermore, immediately below W340, W330, dated to the Early Bronze Age was found (see above). The elevation of the latter is equivalent with that of W308. From the north-west, this room is also bounded by W318, which also served as the south-western wall of Room 4.

<sup>4</sup> A similar channel was found in previous excavations in Area W (Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33).

<sup>5</sup> Similar paved areas with built ovens were also unearthened in the domestic buildings in Area W of the previous excavations (Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1993: 51; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33).

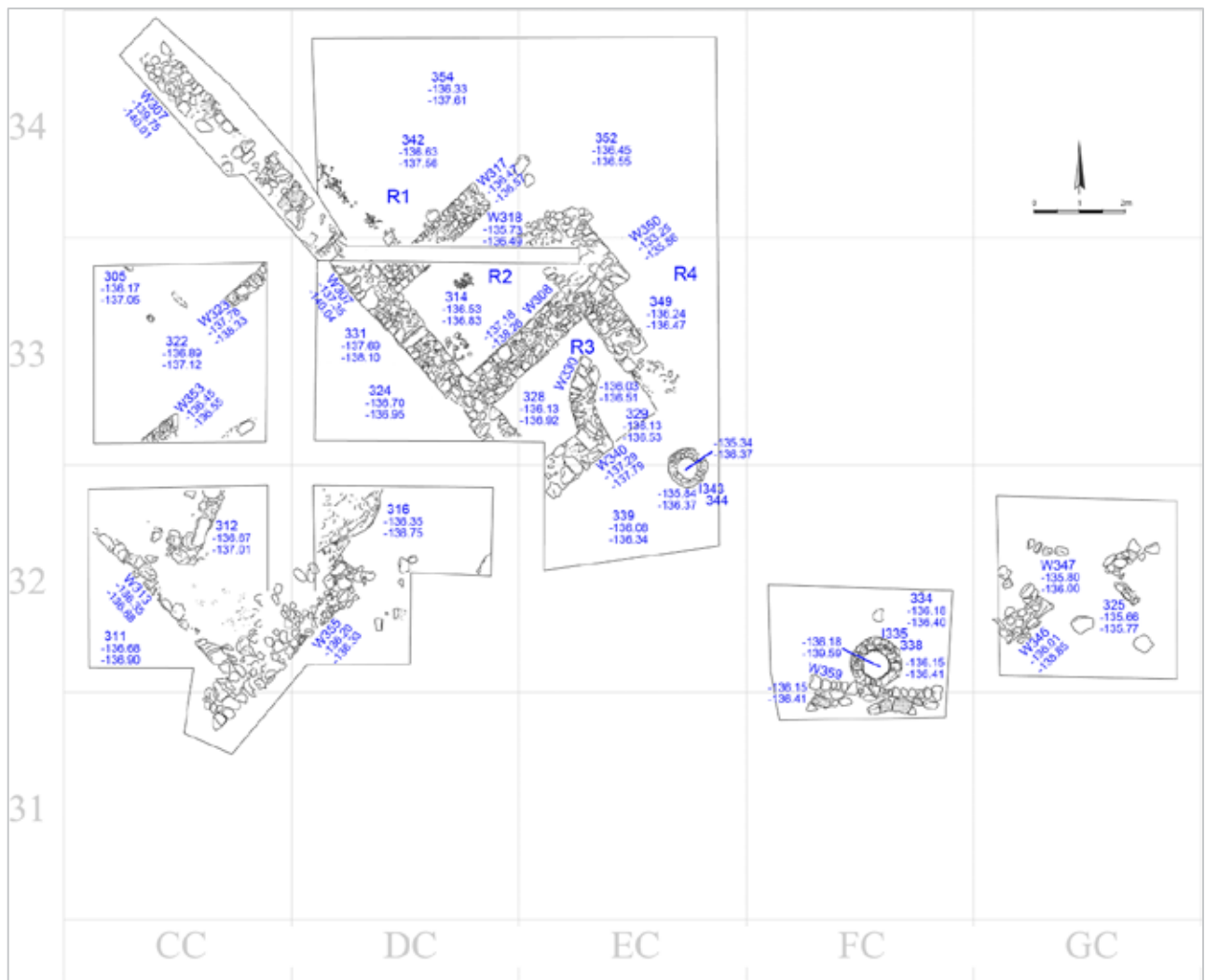


Figure 7. Plan of Area C (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).



*Figure 8. Photo of W307, from east, with intersecting mudbrick to the right (German-Israeli Tell Izṭabba Excavation Project).*

The latter, from which only a small corner was preserved, seems to have also been constructed at the same elevation of Room 3. Room 4 was bounded from the north-west by W350, which collapsed and is represented by only a few stones.

The area west of W307 seems to have served as an open courtyard, as evidenced by one complete amphora and

numerous flat laying pottery sherds (L322). A small wall (W323), consisting of a single row of small to medium-sized fieldstones was found, which may have abutted W307 from the north-east. It could belong to an installation which was only partially preserved. Another small fragmentary wall (W353) was found to the south-west whose function is also unclear. It seems that further south, the area was filled and raised in order to create a flat platform, as indicated by W313, which consists of a single row of stones whose south-western face was flat while the north-eastern face was unworked. In the fill used to erect the platform, a hewn stone slab was found bearing a fragmentary Greek inscription. The platform could have belonged to another structure represented by a single fragmentary wall, W355, which was exposed to a length of c. 5m, preserved two courses high. Nevertheless, it is also possible that W353 was constructed as part of this platform.

To the south-east of the structure, two circular installations were unearthed, I335 and I343. These seem to have served as bins for storage. They were constructed of small fieldstones. Neither their inner nor exterior faces were coated with plaster, and it seems they were held together by mud. Inside these installations, Hellenistic period sherds were unearthed, indicating they were contemporary

with the structure. Installation 343 was excavated to its bottom, which consisted of mudbrick material, and was found to be *c.* 1m deep (L344). Installation 335, on the other hand, was significantly deeper. It was excavated to a depth of *c.* 3.5m (L338), and its bottom was not reached. Excavation had to be stopped due to safety reasons. Access to its bottom was facilitated by parallel recesses built into its inner walls. The top three meters of the shaft were completely vertical, while the bottom was slightly wider, perhaps indicating that further down, the shaft became bell-shaped. It is possible this installation was initially built as a shaft leading to an underground installation, whose function is yet to be clarified. Archaeobotanical material was retrieved and analyzed from both installations (Orendi, Lichtenberger and Tal 2021). This material provides important evidence for the botanical diet of the Hellenistic inhabitants of the settlement. The plant remains indicate that the settlers consumed similar crops as were traditionally used in the region. This observation suggests a locally well embedded Hellenistic settlement that shared agricultural knowledge with other local groups.

Installation 335 was built against a wall (W359) constructed of two rows of small- to medium-sized fieldstones, with a mudbrick superstructure, found south of the installation. The wall was built of two rows of small to medium sized fieldstones, measuring *c.* 70cm in width, with a mudbrick superstructure which was only partly preserved. It was exposed to a length of *c.* 2.9m and preserved 2–3 courses high. Wall 359 was exposed to a length of *c.* 2.9m, measured *c.* 70cm wide and was E–W oriented, which may suggest it was not an integral part of the structure. Further east of I335, two small adjoining walls were unearthed. Wall 346 was exposed to a length of *c.* 1.2m. It was constructed of small to medium-sized fieldstones set in two rows, along a NE–SW axis and is *c.* 50cm thick. Its north-eastern edge formed a corner with W347, which was poorly preserved. No floor was found related to these walls and the fill around them contained many Early Bronze Age sherds. However, their similar orientation to that of the structure and their straight alignments support a Hellenistic date.

In Area D, the remains of at least two large, but also extremely damaged, domestic structures were unearthed. These remains adjoin the remains previously unearthed in Area Z (Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1993: 50–51; Mazor and Atrash 2017: 88; 2018: 6; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1998: 33), allowing for a new reconstruction of the residential quarter.

The main architectural feature found in the area is W422 (see Figure 3). This wall, which likely is part of a foundation, is constructed of small to medium-sized fieldstones and large over-lapping sundried mudbricks, each measuring *c.* 30 × 70cm, producing a total width of *c.* 1.2m. The wall was unearthed in two separate segments measuring together some 16m on a NE–SW axis. Its mid-section was cut by the 'Podium Building' (see below) and its stones must have been thoroughly robbed in antiquity, most likely in order to construct the 'Podium Building' (see below) and perhaps also the nearby Byzantine city

wall. The only visible remains of the north-eastern section of the wall are its massive mudbricks which were unsuitable for later building activities. The south-western section of W422 was also found in a poor state of preservation, although small segments were preserved up to three courses high (-134.79/-135.07m; see Figure 3). This wall was constructed in the same orientation of the Hellenistic structure unearthed in Area C and it seems to have adjoined the Hellenistic walls found during previous excavations at the site, creating a monumental structure.

A poorly preserved wall (W510) was found adjoining from the west to the south-western end of W422. This wall, constructed of small to medium-sized fieldstones and mudbricks, was exposed to a length of *c.* 2m in a single course (-135.19/-135.26m). Parallel to W422, another wall, W421, was found some 3.5m to the north-west. This wall, which was found in two segments, was constructed of small to medium-sized fieldstones, measuring *c.* 80cm along a NE–SW axis. It was exposed to a length of some 4.5m and seems to extend beyond the excavation limits to the south-west. In the western section of Sq. JC33, a robber's trench was found suggesting the stones of its north-eastern part were robbed in antiquity (Figure 9, Section A-A). Unlike W422, W421 was preserved to a considerable height of *c.* 1.2m (-134.55/-135.75m). Although the construction technique is unlike those of the other walls dated to the Hellenistic period, the orientation of the wall suggests it too should be dated to the same period but likely belongs to a different phase or structure. It is possible that this wall served as an exterior retaining wall similar to W307 in Area C, whose foundations were dug to a depth of *c.* 2m below floor level. North of W421, a round shallow installation constructed of mudbricks and fieldstones was unearthed (I444) whose function is yet to be determined. Further fragmentary walls and floors were unearthed in the north-eastern part of the excavation area; however, these were too poorly preserved to form a coherent plan.

One of the notable Hellenistic discoveries from Area D is a hoard of ten copper-alloyed coins of Alexander II Zabinas (129/8–124/3 BC), wrapped in a white-colored linen (Lichtenberger and Tal 2020; Shamir, Lichtenberger and Tal, in press; for the other coins, see Lichtenberger and Tal 2021).

Our new excavation of Hellenistic remains in Areas B, C and D encountered similar courtyard houses as previous excavations unearthed in the site's Hellenistic occupation as is also apparent in many other sites in Palestine and the Hellenistic southern Levant (Tal 2017: 97–115). The combination with the magnetic data (Lichtenberger, Meyer and Tal 2020) however, questions a strong overall orthogonal plan of the town and emphasizes local

traditions of town planning oriented also on the natural topography. Furthermore, archaeobotanic analysis and the new textile finds (Orendi, Lichtenberger and Tal 2021; Shamir, Lichtenberger and Tal, in press) underlines that the Hellenistic settlement was participating in local



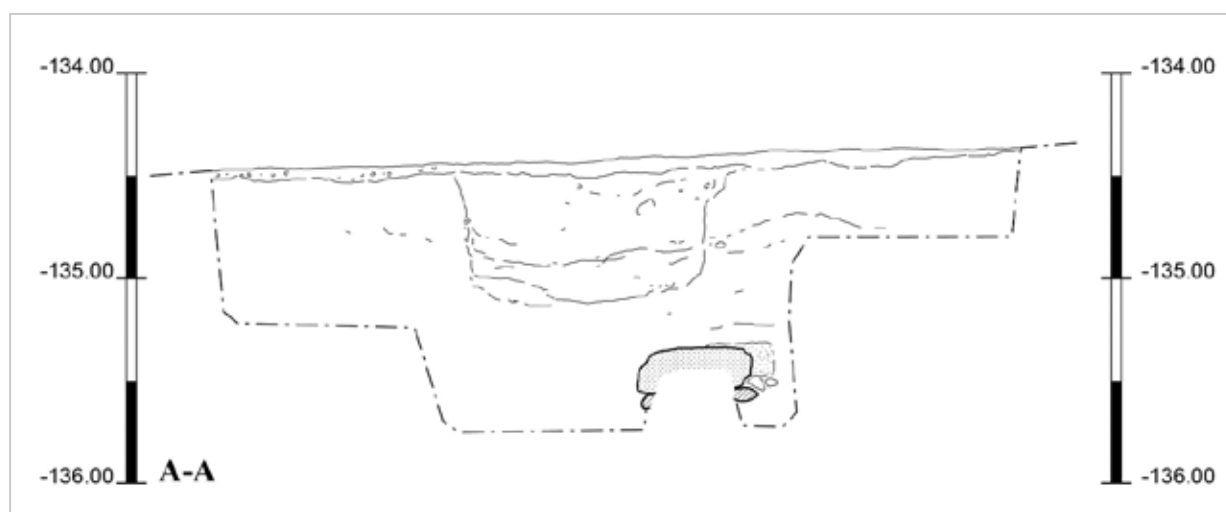


Figure 9. Area D: drawing of section A-A (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

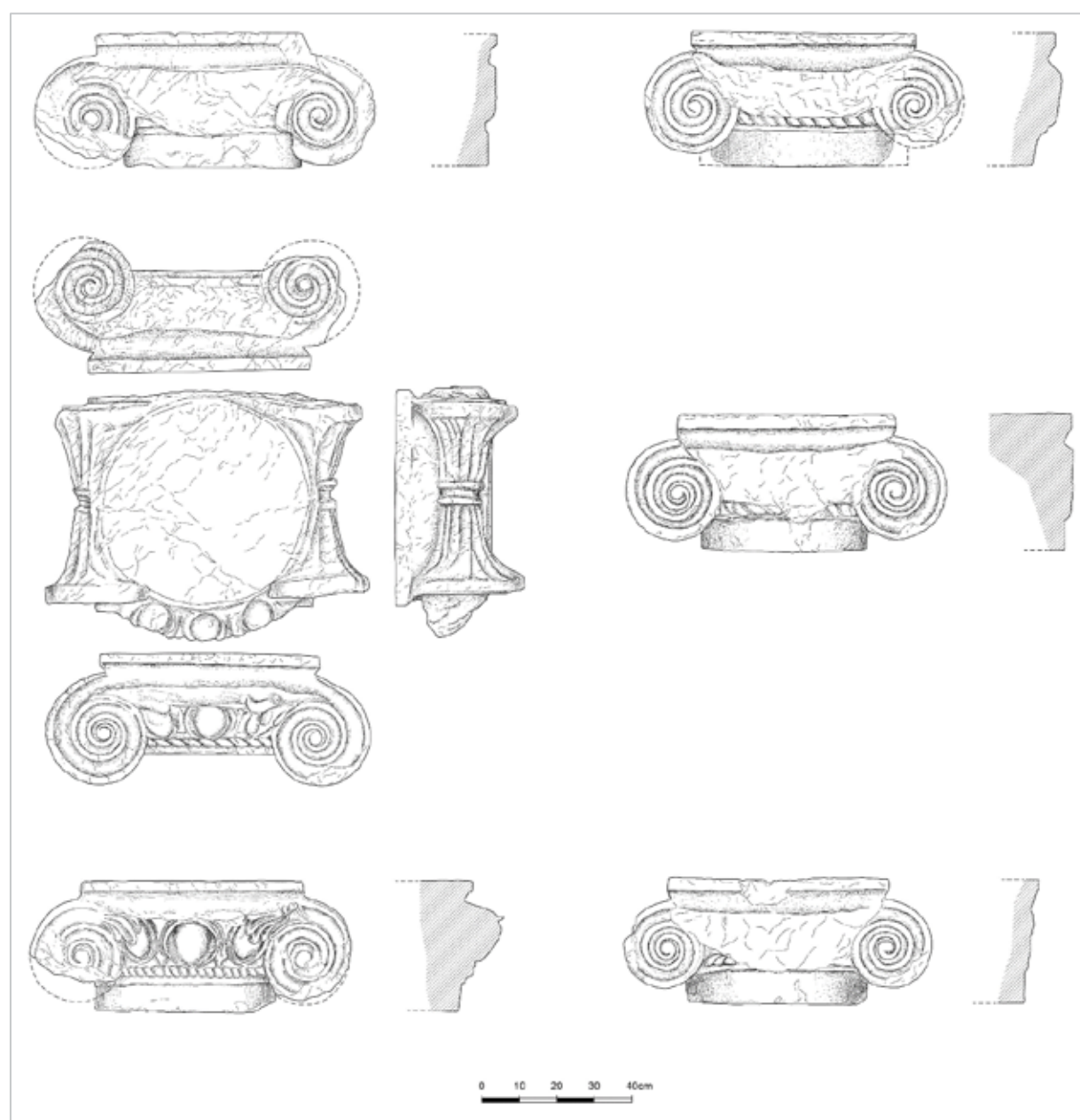


Figure 10. Area D: drawing of six Ionic capitals in W470 (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

knowledge. This suggests that the newly founded Hellenistic settlement was not separated from its surroundings but was embedded and well-connected in the region as is evidenced by the faience and glass finds (see Jackson-Tal, Lichtenberger and Tal 2021). This observation provides a more nuanced picture of how the settlers were interacting in the region and adapting the local environment vis-à-vis their consumption of imported products as is evident by the numerous Aegean amphorae recovered.

### The Roman Period

Roman period architectural remains were found in Area D underneath the 'Podium Building' (see Figure 3). These consist of a wall fragment and stone foundations that were partly reused by the founders of the Byzantine 'Podium Building' (see below). It cannot be excluded that the capitals and column shafts which were incorporated in W470 as spolia originate from these Roman period remains. The architectural elements, which share a similar scheme, appear to originate from a single 2nd/3rd century AD structure. Six Ionic capitals where found (Figure 10), all of which are roughly of the same dimensions and type (height *c.* 35cm, width *c.* 85cm). Although these were interpreted in the past as Hellenistic (Landau and Tzaferis 1979: 152, Pl. 20A; Mazor and Atrash 2017: 88; Peleg-Barkat 2017: 145), they should be dated to the 2nd/3rd centuries AD based on their formal design and style (cf., Arubas 2019: 52–53; Atrash *et al.* in press; Ebeling *et al.* 2021; Fischer and Tal 2003:27). This is also corroborated by the ceramic evidence found in previous excavations, although we hardly encountered stratified Roman material.<sup>6</sup> Wall 472 was found under W512 (see below) and was used as the foundations of the south-eastern face of the 'Podium Building'. However, this wall extends well beyond the limits of the latter and seems to be slightly askew with W512. Nevertheless, it is possible that parts of

the upper courses of W472 within the limits of the 'Podium Building' belong to the subsequent stratum. Wall 472 is *c.* 1.2m thick and was constructed of large roughly cut fieldstones and a rubble fill laid above a foundation of small to medium-sized fieldstones measuring *c.* 1.3m thick. It was constructed along a NE–SW axis and exposed to a length of *c.* 14.5m. A small segment of the original wall seems to have been preserved in the inner north-eastern corner of W470 and W512 (see Figure 3). Its south-western part, which extends beyond the 'Podium Building' (Figure 11; Section B-B) was far better preserved, measuring *c.* 1.3m high in seven courses (-135.00/-136.27m). The north-western end of W472 abuts another wall (W475) whose foundations were found under W470. This wall was built of small-large fieldstones along a NW–SE axis. It was partly exposed to a length of *c.* 8.5m, and its width could not be determined. The south-eastern part of W472 seems to be abutted by another smaller wall (W516) constructed of small to medium-sized fieldstones, which was also only partly exposed.

In total, the Roman in situ remains are comparably faint and the origin of the architectural decoration of the Ionic order remains unknown. The spolia not necessarily stem from Tell Iztabba (East) and might have been brought here from the civic center of the Roman town.

### The Byzantine Period

In the Byzantine period, Tell Iztabba is integrated into the walled city of Scythopolis, and the newly constructed walls cross the Tell E–W. In its western part, ecclesiastical structures and the Samaritan synagogue were erected during this period. The most impressive remains unearthed in Area D date to the Byzantine period and consist of a monumental rectangular structure we named the 'Podium Building' (see Figure 3). This structure measures *c.* 10.5 × 17m and consists of long walls in its eastern section and a

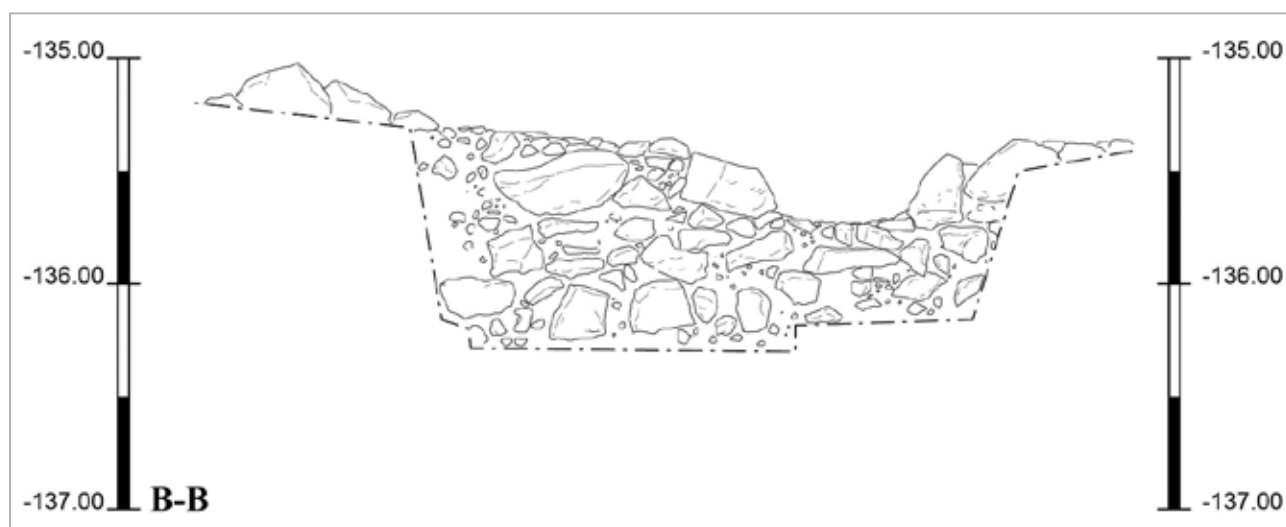


Figure 11. Area D: drawing of section B-B (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication of W. Atrash and G. Mazor. It may be added that our excavations in the area yielded a few Roman pottery finds in mixed fills; hence, the stratigraphic situation described here is more

conjectural than physical. These Ionic capitals need to be studied against the other Ionic capitals of Roman date found in greater Scythopolis.



Figure 12. Photo of L416, the 'Podium' of the 'Podium'-Building, seen from the North. To the right of the L416, runs W422 in a NW-SW direction. (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

massive 5m thick podium in its western section. This 'Podium Building' (L416) was constructed of four walls (W408, W470, W471 and possibly W472) and was found filled in its western section with fieldstone rubble. All its walls were c. 1.2m thick and constructed of large roughly cut fieldstones with a rubble fill in between. Below W408, a foundation layer of flat cobbles was unearthed along the same orientation as this wall. This foundation was constructed as part of the podium's west wall and not reused from earlier periods. The podium is preserved to a height of c. 80cm (-134.74/-135.55m) in four courses. The eastern face of the podium was severely damaged by leveling activities using heavy machinery. The same activities are likely responsible for the levelled preservation height of the structure and must have also damaged the building's southern long wall (W471). Its western part was well preserved while in its eastern part, only the foundations remain abutting W472.

Parallel to W471 stands Wall 470, which is far better preserved. This wall was constructed using the above-mentioned capitals and column shafts which were robbed from a Roman period structure and combined into its masonry as spolia. Closing this structure from the east is a relatively small wall segment (W512) which was constructed in the same way as W470 including a column shaft in secondary use. Wall 512 is 2.6m long and may represent the structure's façade, abutting its doorway which would have been c. 3m wide.

The function of this structure is not clear; however, it is possible it served as a defensive fort or a tower that was constructed on top of the podium (Figure 12). The building's location inside the Byzantine city wall, in close proximity (c. 24m) and parallel to it, overlooking the valley to the south, seems to fit such an interpretation. However, no associated floors were found in or around the structure. Its floor/living surface seems to be indicated by a step in the inner part of W470 at an elevation of c. -135.20m (see Figure 3). The dating of this structure to the

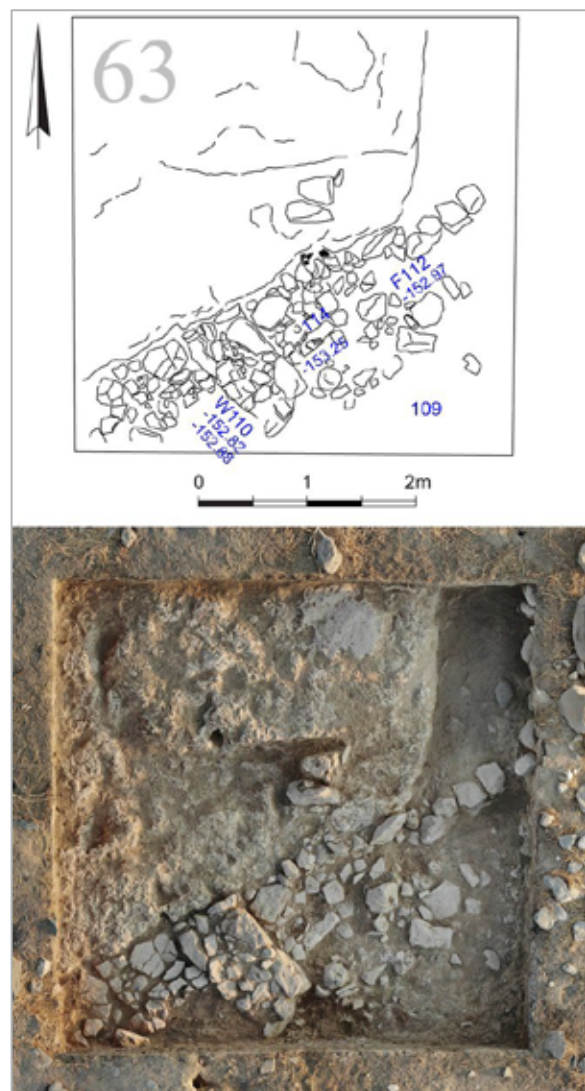


Figure 13. Plan and Orthophoto of Area A1 (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).



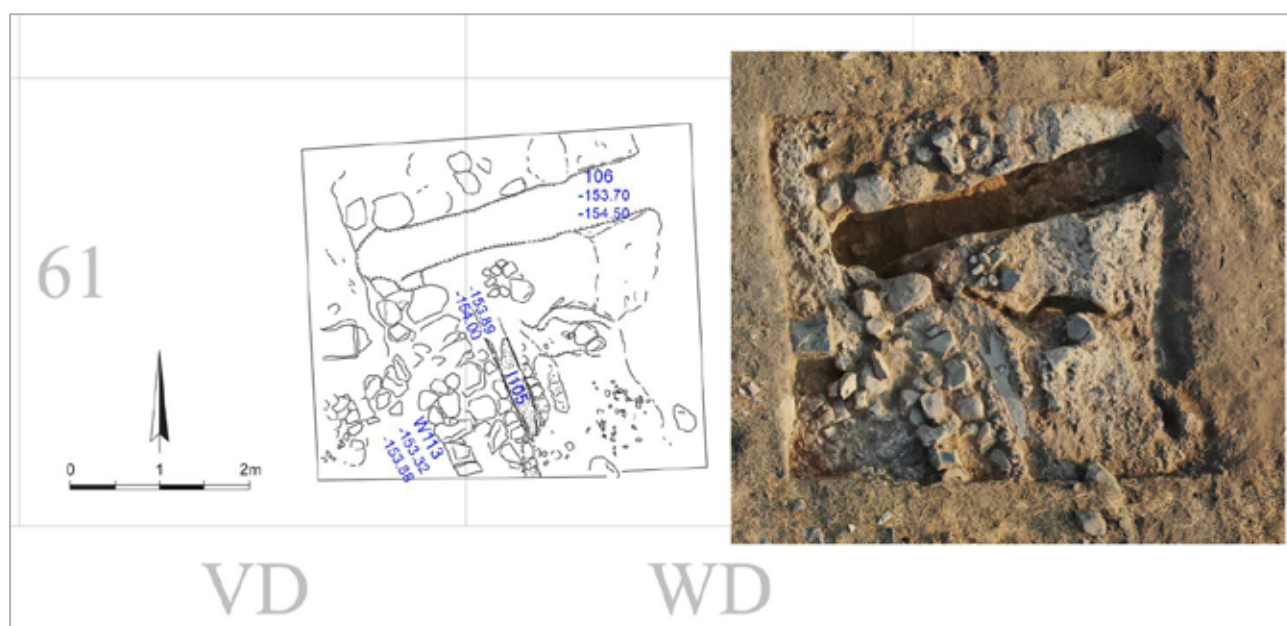


Figure 14. Plan and Orthophoto of Area A2 (German-Israeli Tell Iztabba Excavation Project).

Byzantine period is based on ceramic evidence collected from a probe inside the podium. The integration of Roman spolia speaks for a late antique date.

Scanty Byzantine period remains were also unearthed in Area A, where part of a domestic structure and other installations were found. The domestic structure, of which only a small segment was exposed, consisted of a wall (W110) and two floors (F112 and L109) (Figure 13). Wall 110 was constructed of small to medium-sized fieldstones along a NW–SE axis. It was exposed to a length of c. 1.5m, 40cm wide, and preserved two courses founded directly on the bedrock. The wall abuts a higher segment of the bedrock from the south that seems to have been artificially flattened and used as an integral part of the structure. Floor 112, which abuts W110 from its south-west, seems to have been an interior floor built of flat stone slabs set over beaten earth at the same elevation of the flattened bedrock. To the east of W110, a layer of collapsed debris was exposed (L109) over a beaten earth floor, which may have also been paved with stone slabs. This floor/occupational surface was strewn with pottery sherds in between large, medium, and small fieldstones. A small rectangular stone compartment (a chest) was found (L114) containing Byzantine period glass bottles that may be interpreted as a foundation deposit (cf., Ahipaz and Leibner 2021; Weksler-Bdolah 2014:47). The glass vessels as well as the pottery sherds found in this structure date it to the Late Byzantine period.

Some 22m to the east of the structure, the remains of a large wall and a water channel were unearthed (Figure 14). The wall (W113), built along a N–S axis, was exposed to a length of 5m and it likely extends further beyond the excavation area. It was constructed of two rows of medium to large-sized fieldstones set on the bedrock and was c. 80cm thick. The wall preserved two courses and it may have served as a terrace or a retaining wall, as it was built on the upper part of a natural slope. It abuts a parallel plastered channel (I105) built of small fieldstones and is

founded on the bedrock. These remains are likely dated to the Byzantine period based on sherds found in their foundations. It is possible that W113 was used to funnel water via the plastered channel into the above mentioned Early Bronze Age burial cave which may have been reused as a water cistern.

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# Monumentalizing Nysa-Scythopolis from the Late 1st - 2nd century AD

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*From the late 1st century AD through the 2nd century AD Nysa-Scythopolis experienced remarkable, widespread and enduring monumentalization of its civic centres. This process of civic aggrandizement and beautification accelerated in the later years of the Emperor Trajan and especially during the reign of Hadrian. Hadrian's visit to the region c. AD 130 seems to have provided a rationale for some of the largesse and expansion within the city. This article details the numerous construction projects and the development in Nysa-Scythopolis, with a particular focus on the monumental construction, civic architecture, and urban planning throughout the 2nd century AD. These developments, and the remarkable buildings and design within the civic centre, gave a new, and greater status to the Decapolis region, and to its capital Nysa-Scythopolis in particular.*

KEYWORDS: NYSA-SCYTHOPOLIS; MONUMENTALIZATION; HADRIAN; THEATRE.

## Introduction

Situated at the northeastern part of the fertile Beth She'an Valley, Nysa-Scythopolis owed its importance and vitality throughout history to its strategic geopolitical location situated at the confluence of the Jordan Valley and the other regional valleys that cross the country's central mountain range. From at least the Bronze age Beth She'an, later known from the classical periods as Nysa-Scythopolis, and subsequently during the Islamic period Baysān, was situated at an important regional crossroad (*capita viarium*) that connected the main routes from Caesarea Maritima via Legio and Nysa-Scythopolis eastward toward Damascus and the *poleis* of the *Decapolis* and *Via Traiana Nova*, and southward to Aelia Capitolina and Flavia Neapolis (Isaac and Roll 1982: 109–113; Roll 2005: 107–118). The Beth She'an Valley slopes moderately eastward from the Gilboa ridge to the west toward the Jordan Valley in the east (c. 100 - 140m). To the north the low basalt hills open to the wide plain of the Jezreel Valley. The city is surrounded on three sides by a flat topography, while in the east the wide plain slopes steeply down the Jordan Valley. As the region is below sea level, its climate is very arid. Nysa-Scythopolis marks the western most extension of the Transjordan desert belt. However, the area was always fertile and densely populated with numerous springs and several perennial streams which supplied the city and the valleys rural

settlements with abundant water sources (Nir 1961: 19–31).

In the mid-3rd century BC Ptolemy II Philadelphus built a military post and administrative centre over the earlier Beth She'an mound.<sup>1</sup> In c. 170 BC Antiochus IV founded a self-administrated polis over adjacent Tel Iztabba.<sup>2</sup> Roman Nysa-Scythopolis was founded in the wide area south of the Ḥarod (*Jalud*) stream within the basin of the Amal Stream and its surrounding low hills. Approached from the northern plain the deep gorge of the Ḥarod Stream was crossed by bridges. A line of low, flat hills along the northern bank of Harod Stream marked the city's northern boundary. The hills that reach the height of c. -136 m have moderate slopes on their northern side, and rather steep slopes in the south, marking the Ḥarod Stream's northern bank. To the west lies Tel Naharon that housed an *extra muros* residential quarter dating to the Byzantine period. At the centre stretches the long hill of Tel Iztabba, the location of Nysa-Scythopolis during the Hellenistic period (170–108/107 BC), later occupied by several monasteries and the northern section of the Byzantine period city wall. The honeycombed northern slope of the Ḥarod Stream served as the city's necropolis during the Middle Bronze age, while the eastern hill of Tel Hammam occupied the city's necropolis during the Byzantine period (Figure 1).

The foundation legend of the city, its rather obscure names (*Κυθωνπόλις*, *Νύσσα*),<sup>3</sup> and the founder's identity

<sup>1</sup> Early excavations were conducted at Beth She'an mound in the years 1922–1933 by the University Museum of Philadelphia (UME). The expedition first uncovered an Early Islamic stratum, a round church and monastery and a residential quarter of the Byzantine Period, Roman temple and scanty remains of the Hellenistic period. It later concentrated in the Bronze and Iron age strata (FitzGerald 1930; 1931; Rowe 1930). Resumed excavation during the years 1989–1996 by the Hebrew university archaeological institute (IAHU) further exposed strata from the Early Bronze age to the Byzantine period (Mazar 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Early excavations conducted over Tel Iztabba revealed part of the Hellenistic City wall, a residential quarter, and various installations (Landau and Tzaferis 1979; Tzori 1962: 152). Excavations at Tel

Iztabba were resumed in 1991–1996 by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) expedition directed by G. Mazor and R. Bar-Nathan. The excavations revealed parts of the Hellenistic period polis and its city wall and two monasteries and a city wall of the Byzantine period (Mazor and Atrash 2017, Mazar, Atrash and Finkielsztein 2018).

<sup>3</sup> The name Scythopolis appears in the Book of Judith 3.10, in Polybius V, 70. 4–5, and I Macc. 5.52; 12. 40; II Macc. 12.29–30. The name Nysa, according to De Segni, also appears in additional learned or poetic contexts (Di Segni 1997: 145, n. 20, 21). Di Segni further points out that the name Nysa was not used by the Ptolemies (*RE* XVII, 2, 1937: 1627–1654).



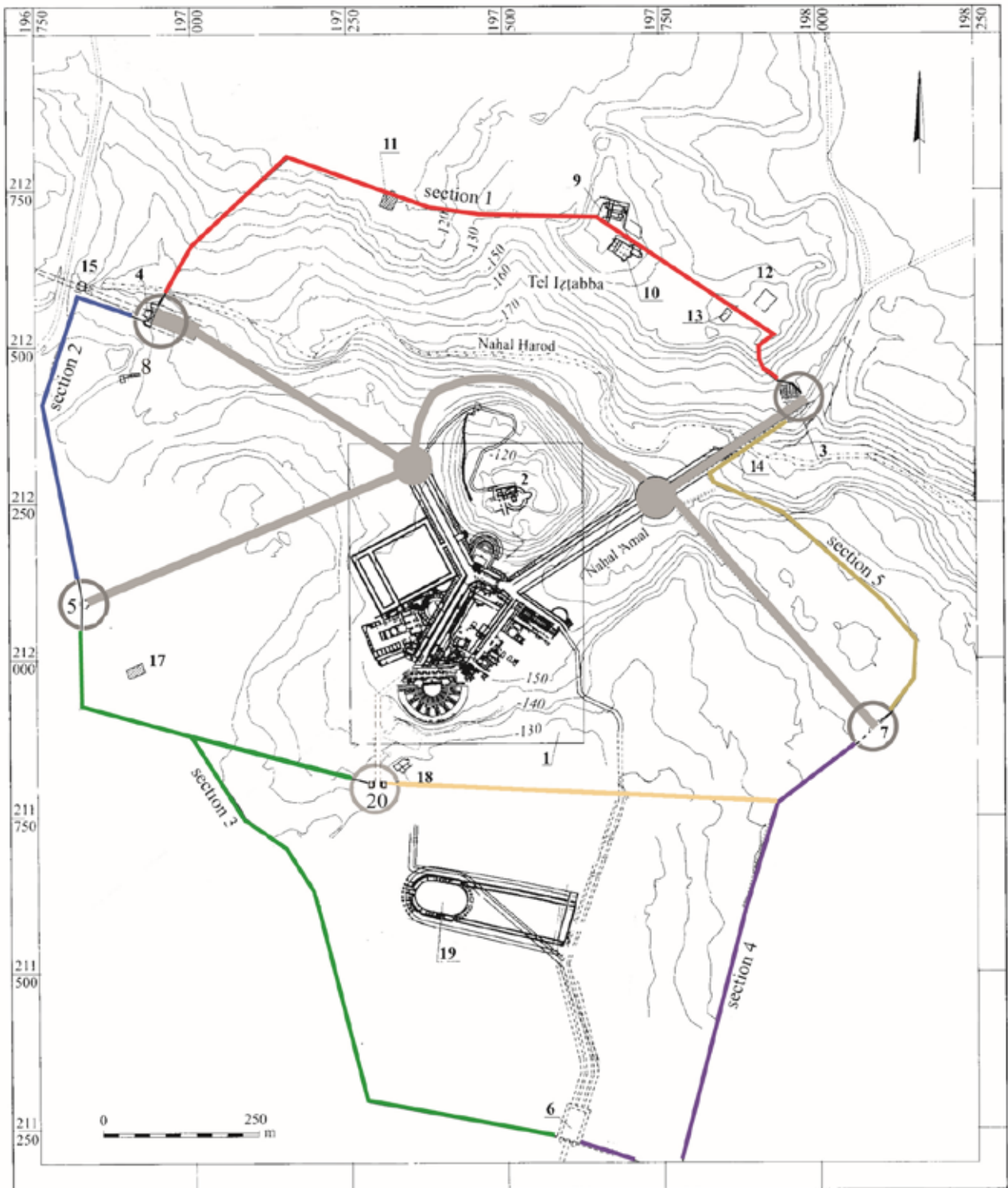


Figure 1. Nysa-Scythopolis: city plan of the Byzantine period (T. Meltsen).

1. Civic centre; 2. Tel Bet She'an; 3. Northwest (Caesarea) city gate; 4. Northwest (Caesarea) city gate; 5. Southwest (Neapolis) city gate; 6. Southern (Jerusalem) city gate; 7. Northwest (Caesarea) city gate; 8. Imhof Monastery; 9. Church of Andreas; 10. Church of the Martir; 11. Monastery of Lady Mary; 12. rea W; 13. Hellenistic city; 14. Eastern bridge (Jiser el-Maktu'a); 15. Western bridge; 16. Area Z; 17. House of Kyrios; 18. Bathhouse; 19. Amphitheatre (Hippodrome); 20. Southern (Aelia Capitolina) city gate.

(Dionysos) were firmly established, according to Lea Di Segni (Di Segni 1997: 139–161), in her analysis of an inscription that refers to Dionysos as the city founder (*Θεῶ Διονύσου κτίστη τῷ κυρίῳ*). Pliny (*NH* V, 74) in his 1st century AD list of cities that formed the *Decapolis*

remarks: ‘Scythopolis, previously called Nysa, as Liber Pater buried his nurse there, having settled Scythians [at the site]’. His legendary remark was later repeated by the

3rd century AD writer Solinus.<sup>4</sup> Rigsby (1980: 238–242) states that Nysa was a dynastic name of the eldest daughter of Antiochus IV who founded and renamed the city following her birth in c. 174 BC. Therefore, the name Nysa has no relation to the local myth of Dionysos and was later added to the name Scythopolis. Josephus Flavius (War 2: 458–459) states that Nysa-Scythopolis, situated west of the Jordan river, was the largest polis of the *Decapolis*.

The Roman annexation of Syria under Pompey the Great in 64/63 BC established Coele-Syria as a Roman province. Gabinius, the first governor of the province (57–55 BC), re-established Nysa-Scythopolis and for a period the city

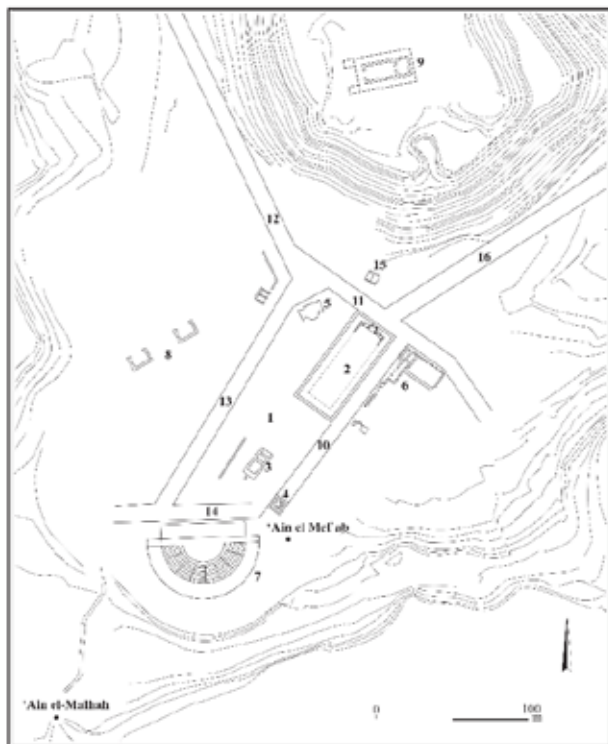


Figure 2. Nysa-Scythopolis: plan of civic centre of the 1st century AD (T. Meltzen): 1. Forum, 2. Basilica; 3. Augustus Temple; 4. Kore Persephone Temple; 5. Kalybe; 6. Bathhouse; 7. Southern Theatre; 8. Public Halls; 9. Temple of Zeus Akraios; 10. Temple Street; 11. Pre-Monument Street; 12. Pre-Northern Street; 13. Pre-Palladius Street; 14. Theatre Street; 15. Shops; 16. Pre-Valley Street.

was called *Gabinia Nysa* according to at least some of its coins (Barkay 2003: 35–41). The ruined settlements over both mounds (Tel Beth She'an and Tel Iztabba) were extensive and the Roman polis was founded in the wide Amal basin and its surrounding hills, while Tel Beth She'an served as an acropolis with a temple dedicated to

Zeus Akraios.<sup>5</sup> Throughout most of the 2nd century AD wide scale monumental public works were constructed throughout the *poleis* of the eastern provinces. Nysa-Scythopolis was certainly no exception to these monumental public works of the period. Following Trajan's death in AD 117 and the ascension of Hadrian, the monumentalization within the *poleis* of the region appears to have accelerated.<sup>6</sup> Many of the monumental public enterprises undertaken during this era such as colonnaded streets, temples, theatres, fora, basilica, thermae, city gates etc., coincided with the much-celebrated visit of the Emperor Hadrian to the region. Epigraphical evidence from the site verifies that Hadrian visited Nysa-Scythopolis and the nearby Roman camp at Tel Shalem. It seems clear the large-scale monumental public munificence Nysa-Scythopolis was first conducted in the polis as a result of Hadrianic initiative. They were later followed under the auspice of the Antonines and concluded under the urban renaissance associated with Septimius Severus (AD 193–211).<sup>7</sup>

### Nysa-Scythopolis in the 1st Century AD

In the first half of the 1st century AD public monuments within the civic centre of Nysa-Scythopolis fitted the complex topography of Amal basin. Excavations indicated that its fundamental urban plan was already established. Its main arteries were paved and at its focal point a forum was constructed.<sup>8</sup> A temenos at its southern side inhabited two temples, the first to Kore Persephone and the second presumably to Augustus and Dea Roma. In the north was a basilica and at its northwestern corner a Kalybe. Northeast of the forum was a balnea and in the south a theatre. Surrounding the forum were four paved streets: 'Temples Street' in the southeast, 'Forum Street' (Pre-Palladius Street) in the northwest, 'Theatre Street' in the south and 'Pre-Monuments Street' in the north (Figure 2). The civic basilica (c. 70x30m) was divided by colonnades to a central hall and two aisles. Column shafts crowned by Ionic capitals were constructed from soft limestone and plastered by stucco. Due to topographical restrains the basilica wall foundations in the southeast were constructed deep into the Amal stream bed, thus creating a subterranean line of shops that faced 'Temples Street' (Tsafir and Foerster 1994: 95–96; 1997: 89). Over the southern bank of Amal stream the western bath was erected (80x80m). Due to topography restrains a subterranean system of vaulted corridors was constructed and a large podium over which the bath was built was achieved, in which the flow

<sup>4</sup> Collectanea rerum memorabilium XXXVI, 156. The Byzantine poet Nonnus in his poem Dionysiaca mentions Nysa as one of the nymphs in Dionysos' cortege with no reference to the legend (Di Segni 1997: n. 15).

<sup>5</sup> In spite of the wide scale excavations conducted in the civic center of Nysa-Scythopolis first by Applebaum (1961/2) in the theatre and further in the years 1986–2002 by the IAA expedition directed by G. Mazar and R. Bar-Nathan and the IAHU expedition directed by the late G. forester and Y. Tsafir no architectural remains of Gabinius polis were revealed apart from coins and pottery. As for Zeus Akraios temple see: Avi-Yonah 1962; Fuks 1983: 78; Rowe 1830: 239.

<sup>6</sup> Boatwright 2000: 57–143; Weber 1936: 294–324.

<sup>7</sup> Inscriptions revealed in a cult complex indicate that Hadrian visited the Roman camp at Tel Shalem and Nysa-Scythopolis on his route from Gerasa to Egypt in AD 130 (Mazar and Atrash 2013: 51–57). Most recently on Tel Shalem see, Arubas, Heinzelmann, Mevorah and Overman 2019: 1–22.

<sup>8</sup> The forum, the focal point of the civic center, followed a western urban plan that elsewhere in the region was not common. It housed the political and social activities as well as cultic celebrations (Boëthius and Ward-Perkins 1970: 401–456) and theatrical performances (Bieber 1961: 21; Vitruvius. I. 7. 1).

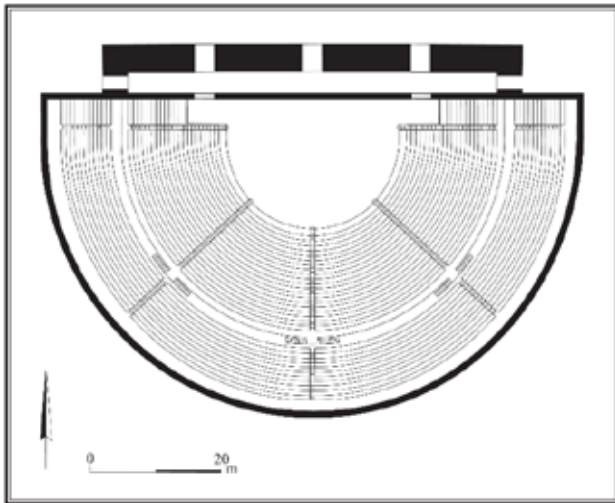


Figure 3. Plan of the southern theatre proposed reconstruction of Phase II (T. Meltsen).

of Amal Stream was channeled further north via 'Valley Street' onto Harod Stream in the north. Three halls (frigidarium, tepidarium and caldarium), natatio and passages of the early bath were revealed. During the 2nd century AD and into the early Byzantine period the bath was upgraded and turned into an imperial therma (Mazor and Bar-Nathan 2000: 292–302). 'Temples Street', 120m long, 12m wide runs between the basilica and the eastern bath. It starts at the piazza altar in the northeast and runs southwest to the Kore-Persephone temple piazza. It is paved by basalt slabs and has shops along its sides at a subterranean level below the basilica and eastern bath floor levels. The temples piazza was paved and both temples had basalt stone foundations with soft plastered limestone superstructures and architectural décor. They were renovated during the reign of Hadrian (Mazor and Atrash 2013: 51–57). The southern theatre was built on the stream bank south of the portico. Its depth was 30m and 47.20m wide. It had a single cavea section (Mazor and Atrash 2015: 10–20) and it seems to have been related to Dionysos founding legend and cult in the polis (Avi-

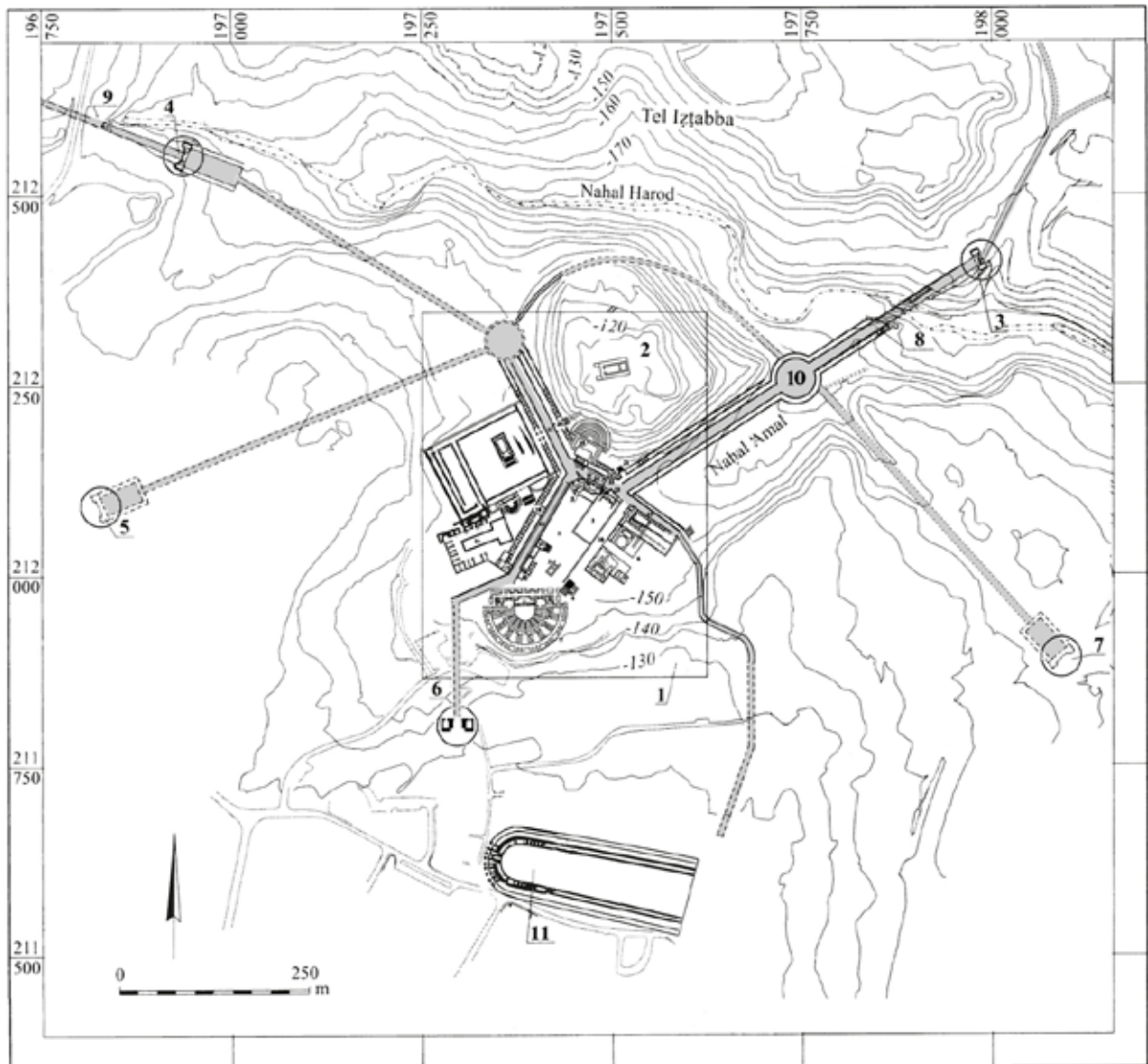


Figure 4. Nysa-Scythopolis: city plan of the Roman period (T. Meltsen): 1. Civic centre; 2. Tel Bet She'an; 3. Northeast (Damascus) city gate; 4. Northwest (Caesarea) city gate; 5. Southwest (Neapolis) city gate; 6. Southern (Aelia Capitolina) city gate; 7. Southeast (Gerasa) city gate; 8. Eastern bridge (Jiser el-Maktu'a); 9. Western bridge; 10. Circular piazza; 11. Hippodrome.



Yonah 1962: 123–134). Thus, Dionysia was celebrated in the forum, theatre and temples.

The early *c.* 1st century AD was a period of political stability and economic prosperity in Nysa-Scythopolis. In contrast to scholarly assumptions that stability and prosperity were enjoyed in the region only from the late 1st century AD, the excavations at Nysa-Scythopolis reveal an earlier beginning to economic prosperity in the city, from approximately Tiberias forward. It was precisely at the outset of the Julio-Claudian era that the city began reminting coins as if to highlight, if not anticipate, its own cultural and economic apogee (Barkay 2003: 35–41).

### Nysa-Scythopolis through the 2nd Century AD

During the era of Nerva (AD 96–98) and Trajan (AD 98–117) Nysa-Scythopolis enjoyed a period of relative prosperity. Its civic centre was not altered, and the southern theatre was enlarged (D. 48m, W. 67m). A second section of seats (*summa cavea*) was added, and its facade décor enriched. Its auditorium that contained 2400 spectators was built partly on the rock slope and over a system of vaulted passages (Figure 3). The seating sections (*ima cavea* – 14, *summa cavea* – 7–9 rows) were divided by nine radial staircases (*scalaria*), similar to the southern and northern theatres at Gerasa (Segal 1999: 72–79). The 3m wide stage had a wooden floor and its 10m long frontal façade wall (*proscenium*) had alternating square and round niches as was customary in 1st century AD theatres (Bieber 1961: 167). The stage was enclosed in the north by a wall façade (*scaena frons*) in which had three entrances. On the sides were tower (*versura*) entrances (cf. to the theatre at Caesarea, Frova 1965: 170). Architectural members of the *scaenae frons* indicated that each floor was decorated by either Ionic or Corinthian columns (Atrash 2015: 280–283). Public complexes of the 1st century AD city had basalt masonry for their foundations and soft limestone masonry and architectural décor plastered by stucco for their superstructure.

The urban topography gave the polis a rich panoramic landscape yet avoided a strictly orthogonal plan of *cardines* and *decomani* separating *insulae*. By the early 2nd century during the era of Hadrian (AD 117–138) the urban plan was monumentalized as colonnaded streets reached the civic centre through five free-standing city gates erected over the sacred boundary line (*pomerium*) of the city (Figure 4). Two of the city gates have been uncovered (Damascus gate in the northeast and Caesarea gate in the northwest), while three others were previously surveyed (Conder and Kitchener 1882: 101–114; Mazor 2004: 40–69; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1994: 268–271). Damascus gate was erected north of Harod stream between Tel Hammam in the east and Tel Iztabba in the west. The location of the gate gave it prominence serving as a monumental focal point, visible from a distance for those

arriving to the city (Figure 5). Damascus gate is 22m wide, 9m in depth, and 17m high. It has two protruding towers with diagonal inner corners and a decorated arch in between. The gate has a single 5.6m wide, 8m high entrance crowned by an attic. Its outer and inner facades decor consisted of Corinthian columns erected over pedestals and crowned by a rich entablature (Figure 6). It



Figure 5. Nysa-Scythopolis: 'Damascus Gate' and 'Valley Street', looking southwest (G. Laron).

resembles in plan and profile the décor of the Hadrianic tripartite gate of Aelia Capitolina (Porta Neapolis) which may have inspired its plan (Mazor 2004: 112–119).<sup>9</sup> From the Damascus gate a 675m long, 8m wide colonnaded street *proceeds*, with 8m wide porticoes arrayed with shops, leading finally to the altar piazza of the civic centre. Colonnades were erected atop pedestals and crowned by Corinthian capitals (see Figure 6). 'Valley Street' crosses Harod Stream over a monumental, vaulted bridge, 37m long, 18m wide, and 14m high, with large ramps on both stream banks. On its route towards the civic centre, it crosses a round square 54m in radius. Two other streets exit the round square, a colonnaded street that reaches Gerasa gate in the east and a street that encircles the mound and connects both round squares east and west of the mound, thus performing a connecting beltway to four of the polis gates (Neapolis, Caesarea, Damascus and Gerasa gates) and to both its main arteries (northern and valley colonnaded streets). Arches were erected where the colonnaded streets entered onto the round square. At the centre of the stood a tetrapylon, parts of which were found. Surrounding the round square, a portico of the Corinthian order was built featuring numerous shops.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For Porta Neapolis see Hamilton 1944: 1–54; Hennessy 1970: 22–27; Magen 2000; 2007: 116–124; Segal 1995: 98; Wightman 1989: 99–104.

<sup>10</sup> Similar round squares were revealed at Gerasa, at the *tetrakoinion* square in the connection point of the *cardo* and southern *decumanus* (Kraeling 1938: 103–115; Segal 1995: 81) and at Bostra were the



Figure 6. 'Damascus Gate'. 'Valley Street' and the round square, reconstruction proposal (T. Meltsen).



Figure 7. Nisa-Scythopolis: 'Caesarea Gate', looking southeast (G. Laron).

'Caesarea City Gate' is in the northwest, south of the Harod Stream (see Figure 4). It is 36m wide, 18m high. Its triple vaulted arch (central 5.3m wide, 8m high, sides 2.6m wide, 5m high) is flanked by two massive towers (20x7m) with round exterior facades and entered from their inner façade (Figures 7-8). The outer and inner façades of the central arch were both decorated with four Corinthian columns erected over pedestals and crowned by a rich

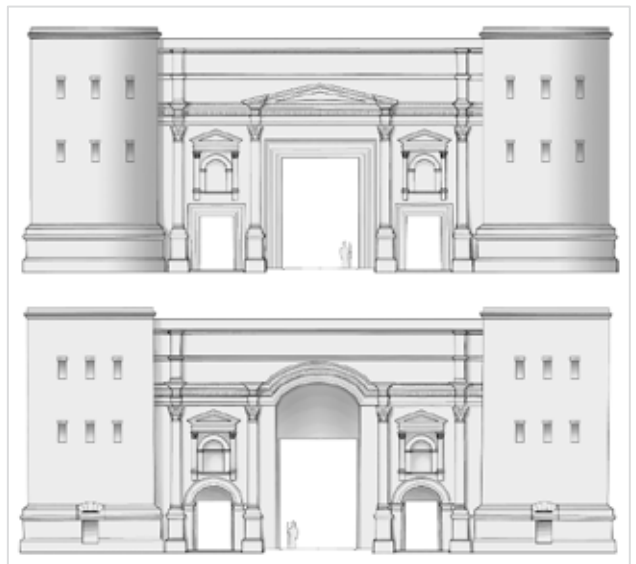


Figure 8. 'Caesarea Gate', reconstruction proposal (T. Meltsen).

*decumanus* crosses the spring street (Macadam 1986: 169–185; Segal 1995: 81).



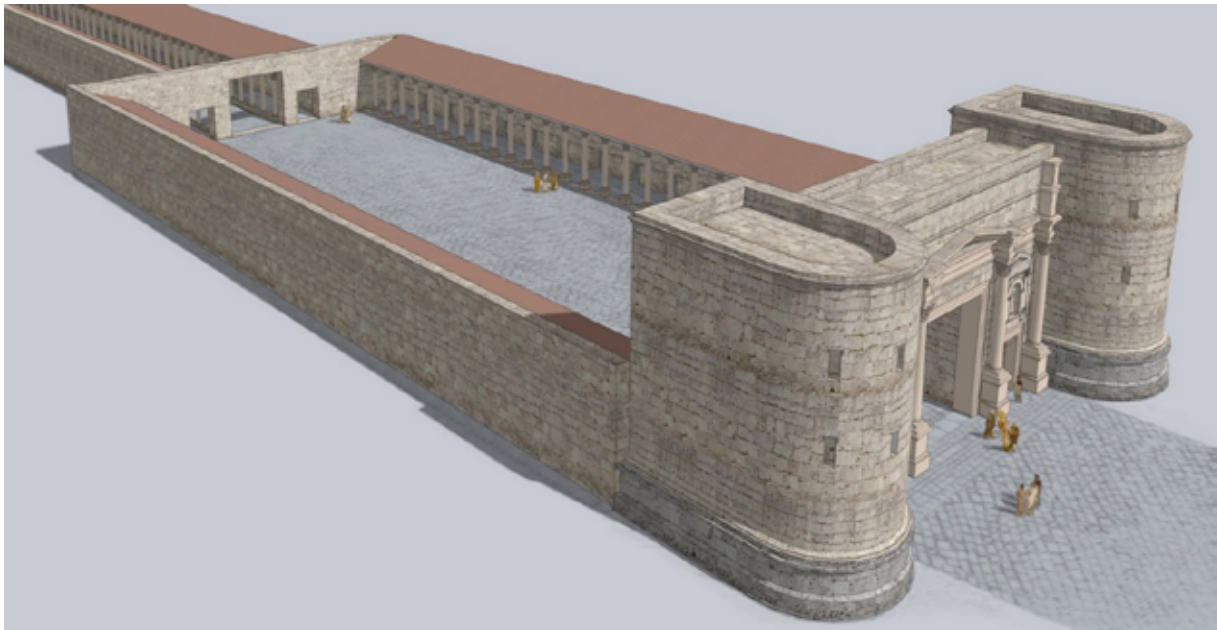


Figure 9. 'Caesarea Gate' and piazza: isometric reconstruction (T. Meltsen).

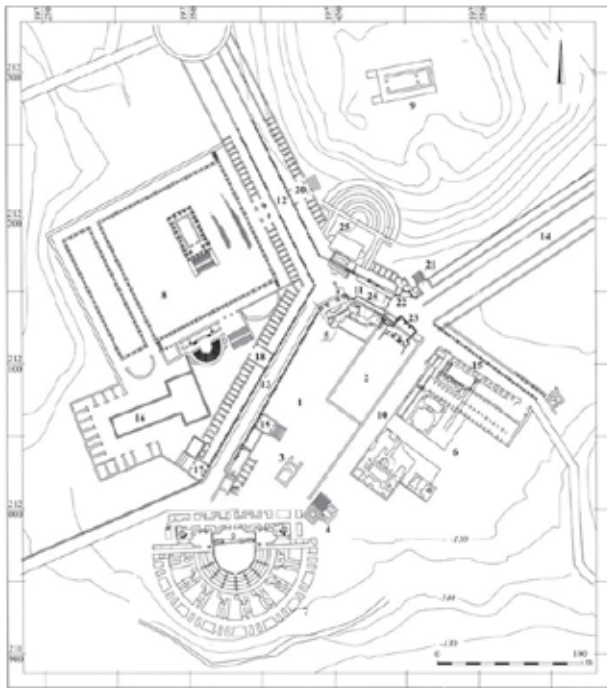


Figure 10. Nysa-Scythopolis: civic centre, plan of the 2nd century AD (T. Meltsen): 1. Forum; 2. Basilica; 3. Augustus Temple; 4. Kore Persephone Temple; 5. Kalybe; 6. Bathhouse; 7. Southern Theatre; 8. Caesareum; 9. Temple of Zeus Akraios; 10. Temple Street; 11. Monument Street; 12. Northern Street; 13. Palladius Street; 14. Valley Street; 15. Eastern Thermae Street; 16. Western Thermae; 17. Thermae Propylaeum; 18. Caesareum Propylaeum; 19. Forum Propylaeum; 20. Temple of Zeus Propylaeum; 21. Valley Street Propylaeum; 22. Altar; 23. Nymphaeum; 24. Northern Theatre.

entablature and an attic. Small niches decorated the arch façade walls over the side entrances.<sup>11</sup> At the gates' inner façade stretches a rectangle paved piazza (77x38m) with porticoes on both sides (Figure 9). At its eastern end, a triple arched gate connects it to 'Northern Street' (Peleg 1994: 139–155). 'Northern Street' was further exposed next to the civic centre (Tsafir and Foerster 1994: 104). Along its route a round square was most probably erected near the mounds' western slope. The 25m wide colonnaded street had a central 11m paved street and 11m wide side porticoes aligned with shops. Colonnades were of the Corinthian order mounted over pedestals. Two monumental propylaea adorned the colonnaded street porticoes. To the north a grand propylaeum adorned the entrance to a staircase that reached Zeus Akraios temple on the mound and to the south a richly adorned propylaeum entered the caesareum (see Figure 4).

The civic centre was revitalized when the forum basilica was renovated along with its cult temenos and both its temples. The colonnaded streets that surrounded the forum were adorned with monumental street elements such as propylaea, piazzas, and nymphaea. Two large thermae were constructed in the east and west and a caesareum in the northwest (Figures 10–12). The southwestern temple might have been dedicated to Augustus and Dea Roma as an inscription on a column drum found in its vicinity states (Figure 13): *With good luck. The council and the people (honour) Cassiodorus (son) of Hermolaos (son) of Cassiodorus (son) of Apollonius, the temple builder, who served as priest of the god Caesar Augustus, and as gymnasiarch, and as agoranomus, lover of his mother-city, founder, because of (his) good will.*<sup>12</sup>

The inscription dated to the early 1st century AD, which names Cassiodorus as the temple builder and priest of

<sup>11</sup> A similar city gate was revealed in the eastern end of the decumanus of Gadara (Umm Qais) termed the monumental gate (Schumacher 1890: 74–76; Segal 1995: 101–103; Weber and Hoffmann 2002: 359–373).

<sup>12</sup> The inscription was read by L. Di Segni.





Figure 11. Aerial view of the Roman-Byzantine civic centre, looking east (G. Laron).

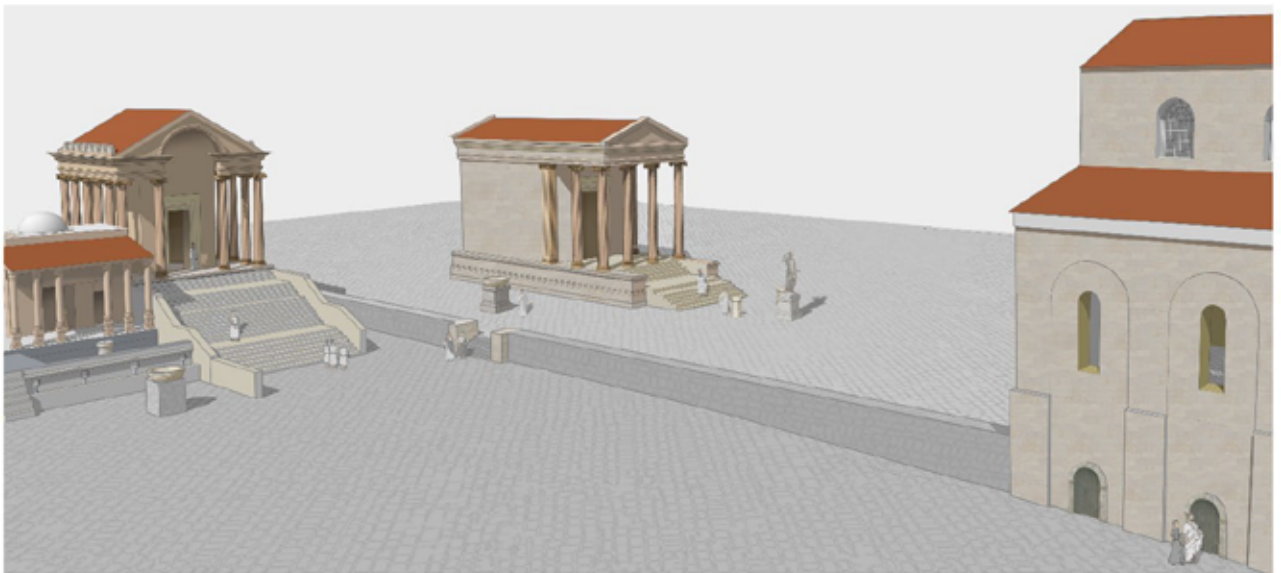


Figure 12. basilica and both temples reconstruction (T. Meltsen).

Caesar Augustus, was found near the foundation of a tetrastyle temple (20x10m) with a staircase between decorated anta leading to its pronaos and naos (Figure 14). Its entablature members were decorated by lion heads. From the temple a wide staircase descends towards the Kore-Persephone temple paved piazza. The square temple

(8x8m) is built atop a 3.4m high podium. Its inner room is round (D. 3.4m) and it has a bema that presumably supported a statue. An 8m wide staircase between anta rises toward the temple from the piazza. Under the staircase is a subterranean vault entered from southeast by a staircase. A window was opened at its far end and an altar



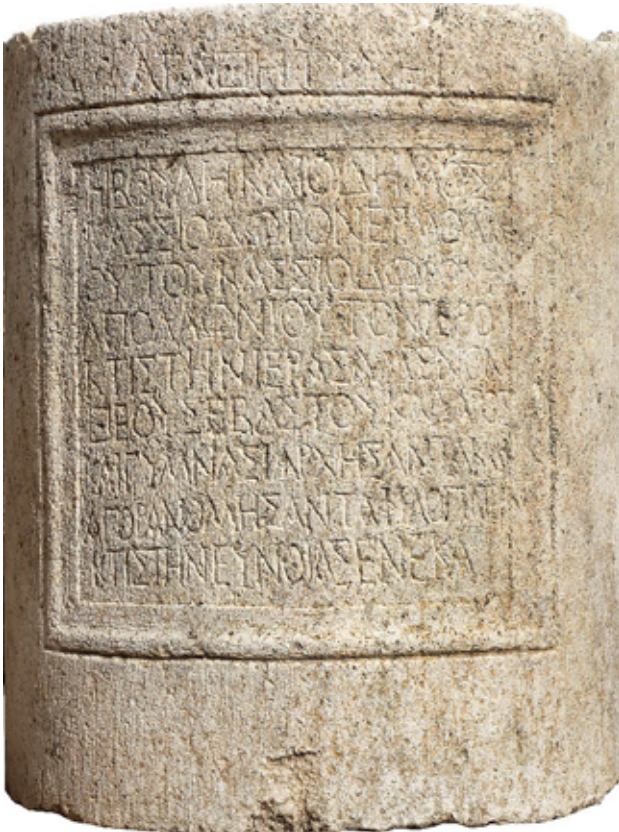


Figure 13. Temple of Augustus, inscription on a column drum (G. Laron).



Figure 14. Forum, temple of Augustus, looking east (G. Laron).

was erected at its centre. Next to the temple two nymphaea were built, the upper round, the lower a rectangle pool with lions and lioness spouts adorning its facade. In between both nymphaea run a portico, the columns of which were erected over pedestals, and it leads to the subterranean vault. On a higher level is an open court with altars. Numerous inscriptions dedicated to Hadrian, Tinius Rufus, the governor of the province, his wife and daughter, goddesses, muses and emperors were found in the temple compound on marble plates and various altars (Figure 15). Within the subterranean vault numerous figurines of



Figure 15. Temples of Kore Persephone, looking northwest (G. Laron).



Figure 16. 'Northern Street', propylaeum, looking east (G. Laron).

various goddesses were revealed. The cult of Demeter and Kore-Persephone was practiced in the polis along with the triad cult of Dionysos, Zeus and Nysa/Tyche as city coins clearly indicate.

On both sides of 'Northern Street' two monuments were constructed, a propylaeum and a caesareum. The propylaeum is situated at the colonnaded eastern portico (see Figure 10). It leads via a grand staircase to Zeus Akraios temple on the mound (Tsafrir and Foerster 1997: Fig. D [12], Photo 9). A 10m wide arch with antae walls on both sides with attached pilasters and pairs of columns. Along the façade were four columns, two of which were heart shaped. East of the propylaeum starts a wide staircase that rises to the acropolis (Figure 16). A similar complex was revealed at Neapolis and Pella. In the former Mount Gerizim served as an acropolis over which in the Hadrianic era a temple and altar were erected as evidenced by their depictions on city coins. A temple erected over a high podium stands on one peak and an altar on the other. A monumental propylaeum and staircase lead to the temple (Magen 2000a: 74–75). In the latter a medallion of Commodus depicts a similar complex mounting the acropolis of Pella (Meshorer 1985: 92).

West of 'Northern Street' lay a caesareum, rectangle Quadro porticoes with a basilica in the west and a temple in the centre dedicated to the imperial cult. A triple



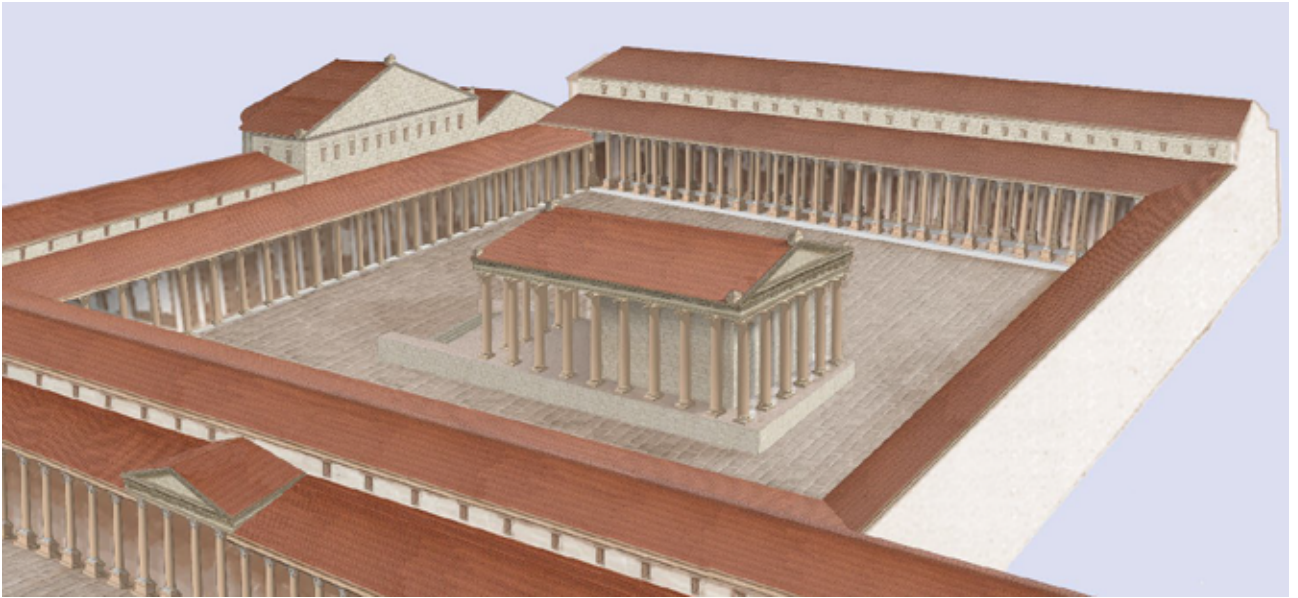


Figure 17. *Caesareum, reconstruction proposal (T. Meltsen).*

entrance propylaeum constructed in between four pilasters and Corinthian columns mounted on pedestals and crowned by a rich gabled entablature provides an entrance to a rectangle grand temenos (140x105m) surrounded by magnificent porticoes in the Ionic order on three of its sides. To the west stands a grand basilica (35x112m), whose limestone pavement slabs were found at a level that was 74cm higher than those of the other three porticoes and the floor level of the compound. of the Corinthian order with columns over pedestals ascended by a wide staircase. The basilica was screened on the side of the compound by a monumental colonnade of the Corinthian order mounted over pedestals. At the inner corners connecting porticoes and basilica, stood heart-shaped columns. At the southern end of the basilica, a semicircular exedra, 15m wide and 8.5m deep, protruded from the temenos' southern perimeter. Along the temenos southern portico protrude the basilica apse in the west, an odeum in the centre, and a semicircle latrine to the east (Figure 17). The caesareum related to the 'Western Therma' in the south by a large door at its basilica. Along the southern portico (96m long) an odeum was built, flanked on either side by halls adorned with distylon-in-antis facades in the Corinthian order.

The odeum, a small, roofed theatre used for chamber music performances, philosophical discourses, and song (*ode*) also served the polis council (*Boule, Bouleterion*). The odeum furnished with a rectangular scaenae (stage house) and a semicircular cavea surrounded by a circumference wall that was strengthened with buttresses (31m wide, 24m in diameter), roofed by timber and clay tiles roofed, auditorium had an ima cavea of 14 rows of seats furnished with profiled, white-limestone seats that accommodated an audience of c. 600 people (Figure 18). Its limestone-paved orchestra was entered via its aditus maximi and it had a narrow pulpitum and a high scaenae frons with three entrances from the porticus of the caesareum.

Apart from minor changes the civic centre at the era of Antoninus Pius (AD 138–161) kept its earlier urban plan. A new hexagon altar was erected in the apse of the forum

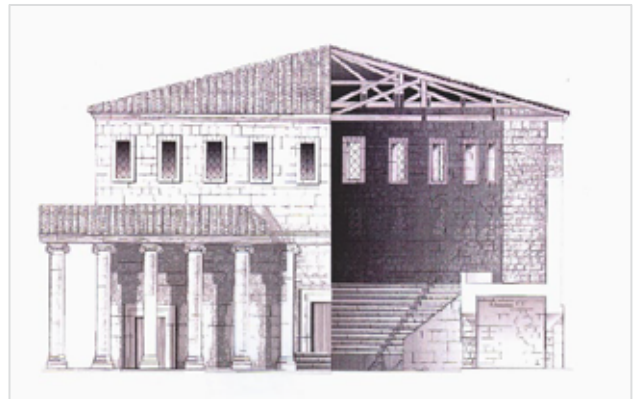


Figure 18. *Odeum reconstructed section (T. Meltsen).*

basilica. Its décor contains a Pan mask and a flute, *thirso*, *syrinx* and *pedum* and in the centre a mask depiction of Dionysos with an inscription: **'With good luck! Seleucus (son) of Ariston (made this altar) as a thanksgiving offering to the lord Dionysos the Founder (ktistes). Year 205' (AD 141/2)** (Di Segni, Foerster and Tsafirir 1999: 59–75). The inscription highlights the importance of the Dionysos foundation-myth for Nisa-Scythopolis. The identity of this great city of the Decapolis was rooted in its connection to Dionysos. City coins, architectural décor, and statues uncovered by excavations throughout the polis also highlight this important foundational connection.

In the era of Marcus Aurelius (AD 131–180) The civic centre was renovated, and several magnificent monuments were built on both sides of 'Monuments Street,' for example, a temple dedicated to Marcus Aurelius, the so-called 'Northern Theatre' and a 'Nymphaeum'. 'Monuments Street' runs down from the temple piazza to 'Valley Street' piazza. The street is paved by basalt stone pavers and has a portico along its northeastern side which parallels the mound slope. It connects 'Antonius Monument' and the 'Northern Theatre'. Along the southeastern side of the street are the Marcus Aurelius temple, the nymphaeum, and a monumental altar (Figure





Figure 19. Nysa-Scythopolis civic centre: Marcus Aurelius temple, nymphaeum and altar, looking southwest (W. Atrash).

19). The temple dedicated to Marcus Aurelius was constructed over the c. 1st century AD Kalybe. It stands on a high podium of subterranean vaults connected to the temple by a winding staircase (Tsafrir and Foerster 1994: 103–104). From the piazza in front of the temple a wide staircase leads to the *pronaos* that has a 20m wide façade consisting of four grand Corinthian columns (9.5m high) erected over pedestals, a richly adorned entablature (Figure 20). A second-wide staircase leads to the *naos* that is semicircle and has an inner apse in which the imperial statue was placed. In the piazza pavement two hexagon cavities indicate the existence of altars, one of which was found in the forum. It carries the inscription: *With good luck! To the Lord Sarapis, Marcus A[ur]elius Septumius, priest, dedicated this altar.*<sup>13</sup> In front of the temple a round pedestal of the statue of Marcus Aurelius was uncovered bearing the inscription: *With good fortune. The city of the Nyseans, also (called) Scythopolitans, the holy and inviolable, one of the Greek cities of Coele Syria, (honoured) the lord Emperor Caesar M. Aurelius Antoninus, through the care of Theodorus (son) of Titus* (Foerster and Tsafrir 1986–1987: 53–58, pl. 17.3). The inscription uses anachronistic terms like *Greek cities* and *Coele Syria* which provide a reminder of the enduring eastern regional ethnic connections the city had to earlier Hellenic ideas and identity.

The ‘Northern Theatre’ was constructed over the mound slope (see Figure 10), its *scaenae frons* façade faces southeast and its cavea is in the northeast (Figures 21–22). Its setting was determined by the urban plan, in which both

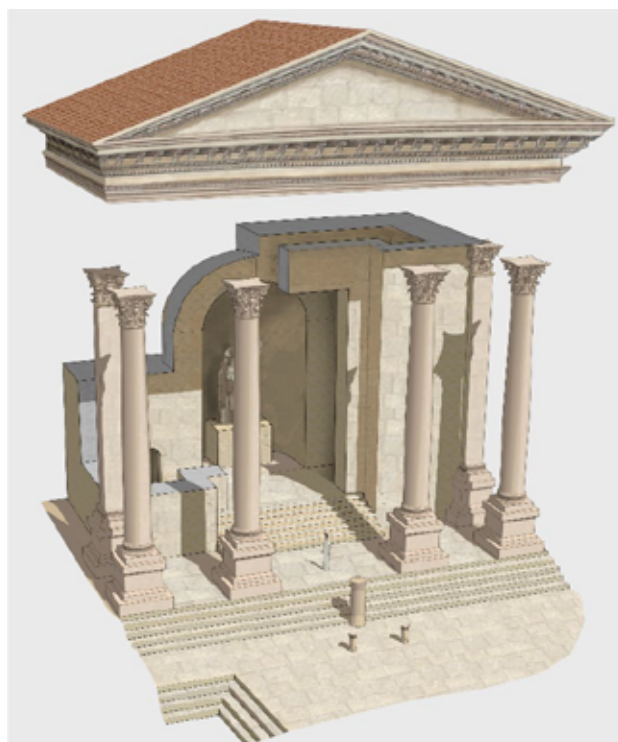


Figure 20. Temple of Marcus Aurelius reconstruction proposal (T. Meltsen).

<sup>13</sup> The inscription was read by L. Di Segni.



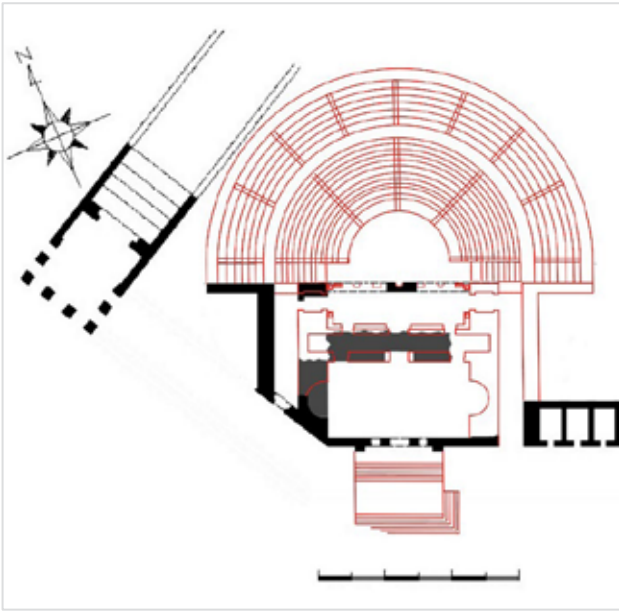


Figure 21. Plan of the 'Northern Theatre' (W. Atrash).



Figure 22. 'Northern Theatre' reconstruction proposal (T. Meltsen).

theatres adorn both end sides of the main colonnaded street of the civic centre.<sup>14</sup> The partial excavations of the theatre revealed the foundations of its stage (*scaena*), part of its stage façade wall (*proscenium*), orchestra and the north-western entrance (*aditus maximus*). At its façade is a wide complex (*postscaenium*) with adorned walls in which apses were erected, a *distylon in antis* façade and a wide staircase surrounded by Corinthian columns erected over pedestals.

The nymphaeum at 'Monuments Street' south of Marcus Aurelius temple has a 23m long façade with a central grand

apse 9m in diameter and a podium. On both side wings are small rectangle niches and 7.2m high fluted Corinthian columns mounted over pedestals. In front is a shallow pool (23x7m). The two storied façades measuring 13m high had niches for statues and was crowned by a semi copula (Figure 23; Tsafirir and Foerster 1994: 103).<sup>15</sup> An inscription revealed over its entablature reads: *Under Flavius Artemidorus, the most magnificent and esteemed count and governor, all the work of the Nymphaeum was done from the foundations*. The inscription dated to the late 4th century AD refers to the reconstruction of the nymphaeum after the earthquake of AD 363 (Tsafirir and Foerster 1994: 105).<sup>16</sup>

The 2nd century AD monumentalizing enterprises at Nysa-Scythopolis ended during the time of Septimius Severus (AD 193–211). Marble was imported from Asia Minor and a new décor of the Flavian Renaissance adorned monuments (Lytelton 1974: 284–297). A new theatre was constructed over the remains of the c. 1st century AD theatre and on 'Monuments Street' an enormous altar dedicated to the imperial cult was built (Tsafirir and Foerster 1994: 97–98). Both were adorned by a rich

Corinthian order constructed from various kinds of imported marble (Mazor and Atrash 2018: 77–111). The monumental altar, 15m high, was constructed on the western side of the piazza facing 'Valley Street.' A high podium with niches and staircases supports a peripteral, ornate superstructure of the Corinthian order. The columns were mounted on decorated pedestals and crowned with an entablature depicting inhabited acanthus scrolls (see Figure 23). This monumental altar is attached to the outer wall of the c. 1st century AD basilica, the apse of which was renovated as the monument was built in the c. mid-

<sup>14</sup> Numerous *poleis* in the region had two theatres, as for instance Gerasa and Gadara. Although most of the Roman theatres face north there are naturally exceptions in the region. The theatres at Philippopolis and Pella face south and the western theatre at Gadara faces west (Mulder and Guinée 1992:387–406; Segal 1988:83–87; Smith and Day 1989:20–22).

<sup>15</sup> A similar nymphaeum adorned the *cardo* next to the temple of Artemis at Gerasa (Browning 1982: Fig. 81).

<sup>16</sup> For inscriptions commemorating false rebuilding of monumental complexes see Witschel 1992: 135–177).



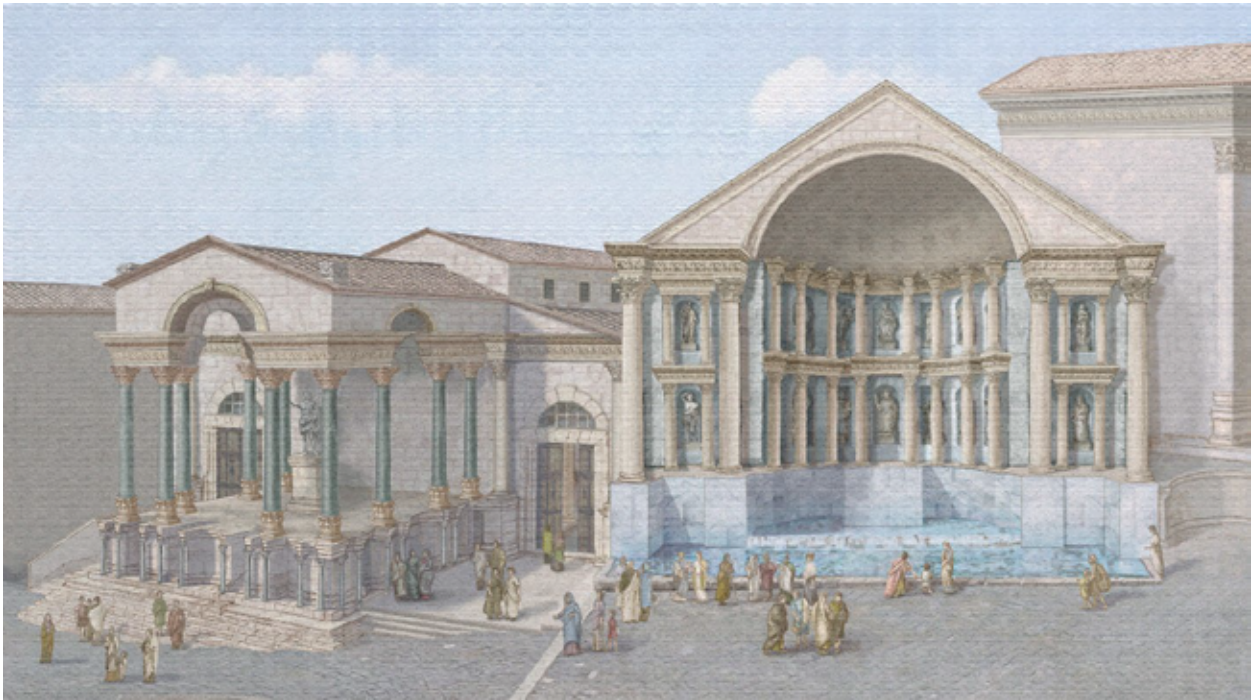


Figure 23. *Nymphaeum and altar reconstruction proposal (T. Meltsen).*

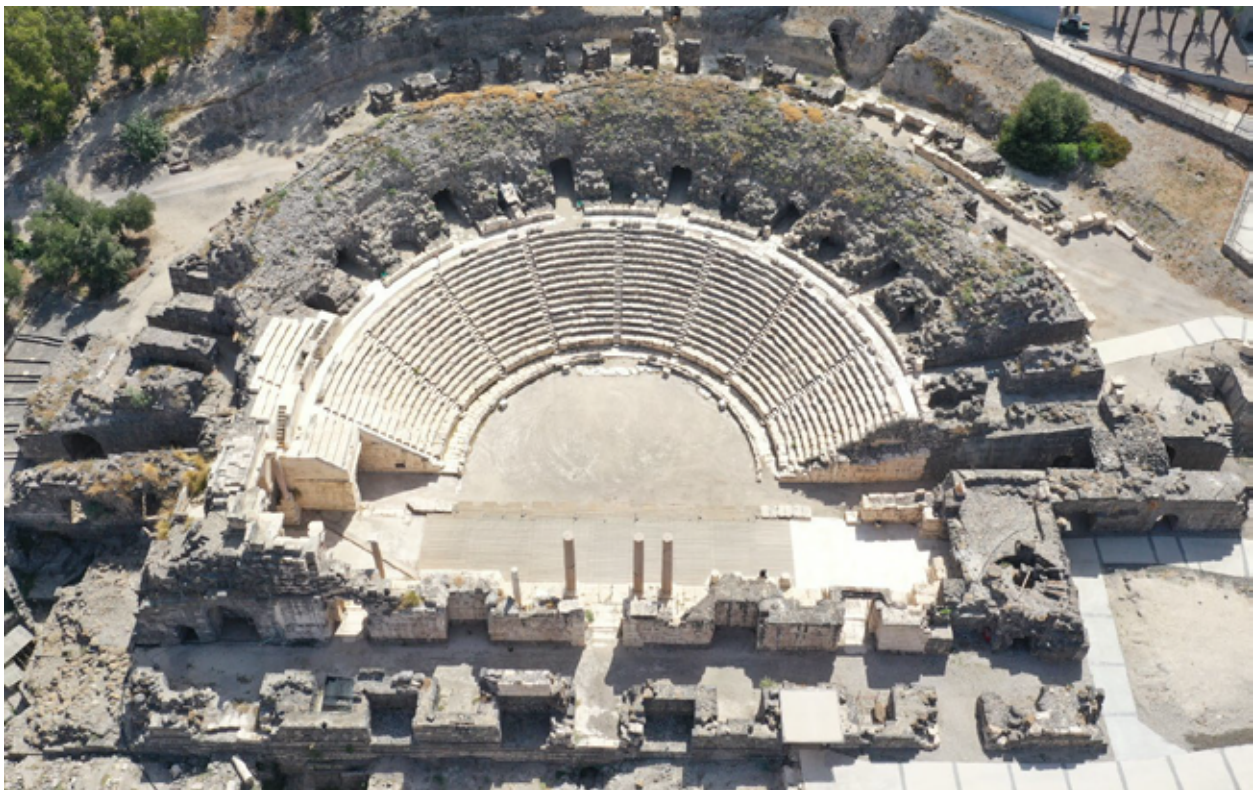


Figure 24. 'Severan Theatre', looking south (A. Ibrahim).

2nd century AD. Two passages on both sides of the altar joined the basilica aisles. The monument served the imperial cult. A similar altar was excavated at Gadara/Umm Qais (Hoffmann 1997: 267–300).

The 'Severan Theatre' was 109m wide, 74m in diameter and housed c. 9000 spectators (Figure 24). Its auditorium (*cavea*) had three sections of seating. In front of the lowest (*ima cavea*) is a 1.2m high podium crowned by a cornice. The seating sections had 15 rows of seats divided by 9 radial staircases (*scalaria*) and two tribunals (*tribunalia*)

over the side vaulted passages (*aditus maximi*). A 1.5m wide semicircle passage (*praecinctio*) separated the sections. In the second section of seating inner facade wall are eight vaulted passages (*vomitoria*) through which one entered the auditorium. These entrances had *tholoi* shaped elliptical roofed cells associated with them that acted as acoustic cells. Each of the passages had double corridors with barrel vaults. One leads into the auditorium and the second to the acoustic cell. Their outer entrances open to a semicircle outer vaulted passage (*ambulacrum*) that also



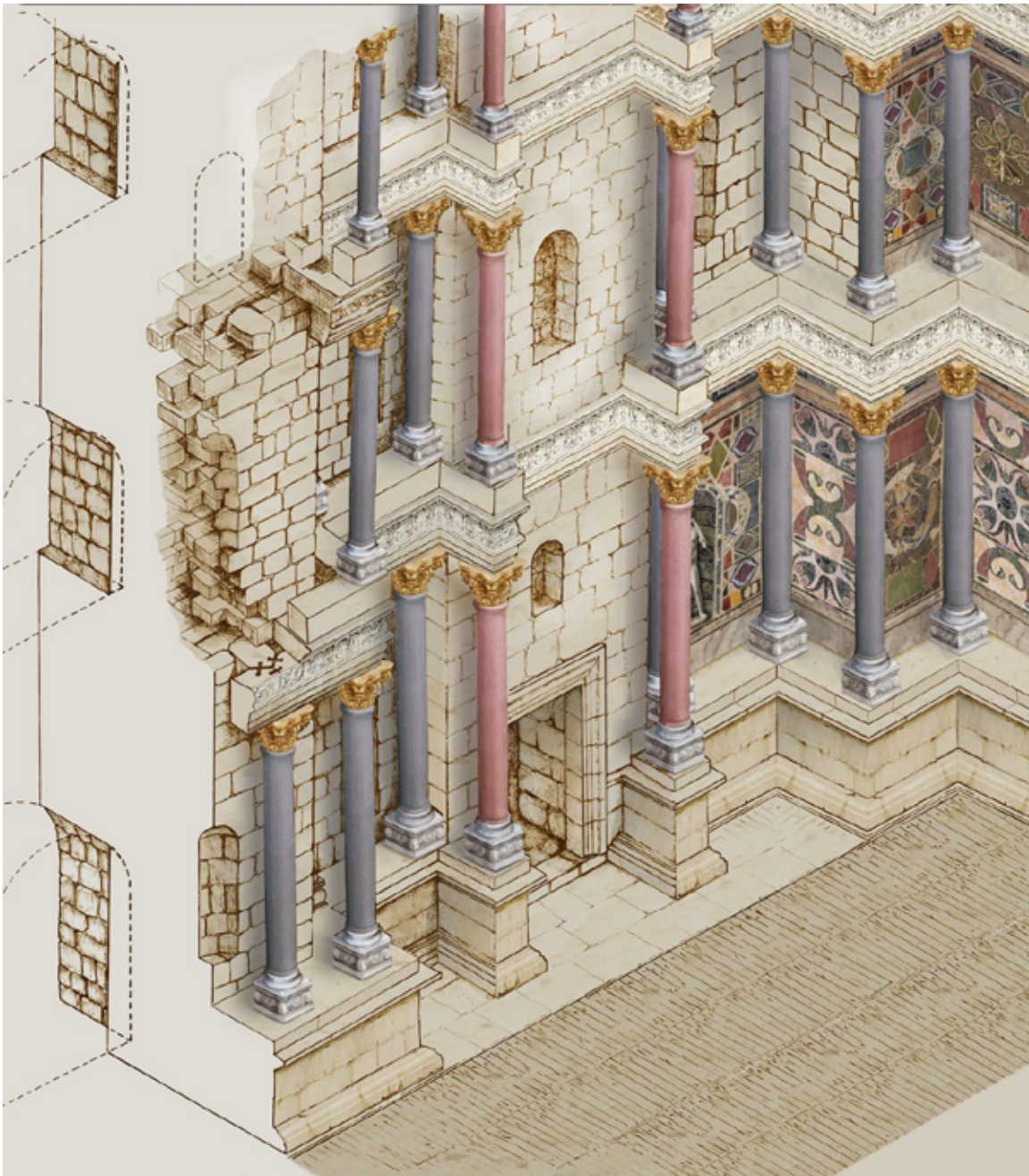


Figure 25. 'Severan Theatre' eastern part of scaenae frons, reconstruction proposal (T. Meltsen).

carries the second section of seats (*summa cavea*). The theatre rear wall was divided into nine sections, each of which has two rooms and a staircase in between that provided access to the upper part of the auditorium. The orchestra was paved by marble pavers and surrounded by dignitaries' seats. A similar *VIP* section also surrounded the upper row of the first section of seats. The orchestra was entered by two grand passageways (*aditus maximi*) from west and east and over their vaulted roofs were the seats of the Tribunes. The stage was enclosed by two towers (*versurae*) in the west and east, in which radial staircases led to the theatre upper levels. Their facades connect to the stage rear wall (*scaenae frons*) and share the same décor. The stage (*pulpitum*) had a wooden floor supported by substructure arches. The stage façade wall (*proscenium*) was adorned by alternating semicircle and rectangle marble plated niches and side staircases. The

stage has five entrances, three at the façade wall, at the centre (*valva regia*) and sides (*hospitalia*) and two at the side towers (*itinera versurarum*). The central entrance is in an apse and has two podia in front creating a propylaeum. The side entrances are set in rectangle apses and have podia in front as well. The façade wall was marble plated (*opus sectile*) (Figure 25) and has niches for statues. In front of the façade wall is a two-story high colonnade in the centre and a three-story high colonnade on both its sides, thus equalling the adorned façade to the auditorium height. The colonnaded façade is constructed from various marble in different colours (white, grey, red and green) imported from Asia Minor, Greece and Egypt. It gave the façade a rich baroque appearance (cf., to theatres at Merida, Orange, and Leptis Magna, Bieber 1961:206; Lyttelton 1974: 84-89).

## Conclusions

Roman control and administration of the 2nd c. AD trade routes in the eastern part of the Mediterranean and Levant helped provide for the economic and cultural efflorescence we see manifest in the material cultural of the eastern Roman *poleis*, especially in the Decapolis region. During and around the time of Hadrian the region experienced an acceleration of *monumental urbanism* of the Roman imperial style that was perhaps unequalled before or after. The regions of the eastern Mediterranean, Levant and Arabia were all touched and transformed as a result of this urban vitality and expansion. The monumentalizing of Nysa-Scythopolis during the early 2nd century AD gained added impetus with the Emperor Hadrian's visit to the region. This phenomenon reflects the heightened importance, if not new centrality of the Levant and Middle East in Roman policy and mindset. This impetus carried forth through the Severan period. Both the sheer size, and the high quality and innovation of the art and architecture of Nysa-Scythopolis highlights the importance of this city in these very important eastern developments. The stature of Nysa-Scythopolis grew as the major city of the *Decapolis*. The vast urban development and expansive projects that were initiated in the city drew architects and masons from all over the region. They practiced both local Hellenistic traditions and new imported architectural trends. They enriched the landscape with new monumental public complexes and décor. Marble was imported and ushered in a new façade for the metropolis. Statues from major workshops of Asia Minor like Aphrodisias adorned city streets, public buildings, and thermae, providing a new appearance, and a new visual and cultural status within the region.

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# **‘This was the Case with Beth She’an’: The Character of a Jewish Community in a Gentile City**

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*This article uses ancient literary and artistic sources in an attempt to study the character of the Jewish community of Beth She’an/Nysa-Scythopolis, as an example of such a community living in a gentile-pagan city. The sources that will be examined include short passages of Flavius Josephus’s ‘History of the Jewish War Against the Romans’, and ‘The Life of Flavius Josephus’; a few short paragraphs from rabbinic literature; and a mosaic floor from an affluent Jewish home, now known as ‘the House of Leontis’.*

*These sources have been discussed in earlier studies, some at great length. However, the purpose of reexamining them is to blend them into a ‘map’, highlighting the middle road chosen by Jews in gentile-pagan cities, in order to lead full Jewish lives while yet conforming to the local culture.*

**KEYWORDS:** BETH SHE’AN; NYSA-SCYTHOPOLIS; HOUSE OF LEONTIS; MEGILLAT TA’ANIT; SHIMON BEN SHAUL; SPEECHES IN JOSEPHUS’S WRITINGS; RABBINIC LITERATURE; GENTILE NEIGHBORS; SYNAGOGUE; PAGAN FESTIVALS; PARALLEL JUDICIAL SYSTEMS.

This article uses ancient literary and artistic sources in an attempt to study the character of the Jewish community of Beth She’an/Nysa-Scythopolis, as an example of such a community living in a gentile-pagan city. ‘Ancient texts, like ancient visual representations, may serve as openings into the cultural and personal worlds of their makers’, wrote Galit Hasan-Rokem (2014: 159). It seems that the few sources we have, though they span several centuries, can nevertheless shed some light on the Jewish community of Beth She’an in the Roman and early Byzantine periods. The sources include short passages of Flavius Josephus’s *History of the Jewish War Against the Romans* (aka *Wars*) and *The Life of Flavius Josephus* (aka *Life*); a few sources from rabbinic literature; and a mosaic floor from an affluent Jewish home, now known as ‘the House of Leontis’. These sources have been discussed in earlier studies, some at great length.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of reexamining the texts and the art is to blend them into a ‘map’, highlighting the middle road chosen by Jews in gentile-pagan cities, in order to lead full Jewish lives while yet conforming to the local culture.

In his book, *Scythopolis – a Greek City in Eretz Israel*, Gideon Fuks devotes a chapter to the Jewish community in Beth She’an (Fuks 1983: 147–156).<sup>2</sup> He begins his survey with events that occurred in the days of Judah Maccabee (mid-2nd century BC) and ends it with a short discussion of Talmudic sources, which tell something of Jewish community life in Beth She’an in the period after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Fuks’s chapter opens with the Jews of Scythopolis speaking to Judah and his followers in praise of their good relations with their neighbors. As a result, Judah refrained from

attacking the city, and returned instead to Jerusalem (2 Maccabees 12: 29–31; Fuks 1983: 147). Aryeh Kasher discusses this event and concludes that the Jews of Beth She’an protected the city out of a common interest with their gentile neighbors, who were disillusioned with the Seleucid regime (Kasher 1988: 78–81). This is the only extant piece of information about relations between Jews and gentiles in the city in the second century BC.

*Setting out from there, they hastened to Scythopolis, which is seventy-five miles from Jerusalem. But when the Jews who dwelt there bore witness to the good will which the people of Scythopolis had shown them and their kind treatment of them in times of misfortune, they thanked them and exhorted them to be well disposed to their race in the future also. Then they went up to Jerusalem, as the feast of weeks was close at hand. (2 Maccabees 12: 29–31).<sup>3</sup>*

At the end of the 2nd century BC, the city fell to the Hasmoneans (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13, 280; *Wars* 1, 2, 7), and its gentile inhabitants were expelled (*Megillat Ta’anit* for 15th and 16th of the month of Sivan).<sup>4</sup> In a period of some forty-four years, from the expansion of the Hasmonean kingdom under John Hyrcanus to Pompey’s conquest of Judea, the fate of the gentile inhabitants of Beth She’an was similar to that of most inhabitants of gentile cities captured by the Hasmoneans (Fuks 1980: 29; 1983: 63; Kasher 1988: 123–127). Pompey’s conquest brought this short period in the history of Beth She’an to an end.

It is difficult to assess the situation of the Jews of the city in the Hasmonean period, or at the beginning of the Roman period, after Gabinus’s settlements.<sup>5</sup> There are few

<sup>1</sup> There is insufficient space to list them all, but some appear in the Bibliography at the end of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Gideon Fuks published this chapter in English as well: Fuks 1982: 407–416.

<sup>3</sup> Josephus gave a laconic description of events in the early days of the Hasmonean revolt: “So they came over Jordan, and arrived at the great

plain, over-against which is situate[sic] the city Bethshan, which is called by the Greeks *Scythopolis*. And going away hastily from thence, they came into Judea...” (*Antiquities of the Jews* XII: 348–349).

<sup>4</sup> *Megillat Ta’anit* for 15th–16th AD of the month of Sivan, see Noam 2003: 69; 196–197.

<sup>5</sup> For the ‘settlements’ of Gabinus, see Smallwood 1967: 89–92.

sources regarding the history of the Jewish community in Beth She'an at the beginning of the Roman period. Gideon Fuks relied on an article by Michael Avi-Yonah (1962: 45–62), who espoused the assumption that the city's Jewish inhabitants were expelled to make way for a Hellenistic population (Fuks 1983: 90–91; see also Kasher 1988: op. cit., 124).

On the eve of the Great Revolt, the Jewish population of Beth She'an apparently numbered several thousand souls.<sup>6</sup> There is no documentary evidence of the judicial status of the Jewish community at that time. Some idea of the degree of Jewish assimilation into gentile culture may be suggested by the thirty or so Jewish ossuaries uncovered in the city's northern cemetery by the Philadelphia expedition in the early 20th century: the inscriptions on the ossuaries were all in Greek (Fuks 1983: 149, note 11).<sup>7</sup>

Outbreaks at the end of the year AD 66 precipitated the Great Revolt, and the consequent deterioration of relations between Jews in Eretz Israel and their gentile neighbors (Shahar 1989). Scythopolis was among the gentile cities attacked by Jews in revenge for the massacre of the Jews of Caesarea:

*Upon which stroke that the Jews received at Cesarea [sic], the whole nation was greatly enraged; so they divided themselves into several parties, and laid waste the villages of the Syrians, and their neighboring cities, Philadelphia, and Sebonitis, and Gerasa, and Pella, and Scythopolis, and after them Gadara, and Hippos; and falling upon Gaulonitis, some cities they destroyed there, and some they set on fire, and then they went to Kedasa, belonging to the Tyrians, and to Ptolemais, and to Gaba, and to Cesarea [sic]; nor was either Sebaste [Samaria] or Askelon able to oppose the violence with which they were attacked; and when they had burnt these to the ground... (Josephus, Wars, 2, 18, 1).*

Josephus describes the horrors of the bloody clashes, and focuses on the massacre in Beth She'an:

*... thus far the conflict had been between Jews and foreigners; but when they made excursions to Scythopolis, they found Jews that acted as enemies; for as they stood in battle-array with those of Scythopolis and preferred their own safety before their relation to us, they fought against their own countrymen; nay, their alacrity was so very great, that those of Scythopolis suspected them. These were afraid, therefore, lest they should make an assault upon the city in the night time, and, to their great misfortune, should thereby make an apology for themselves to their own people for their revolt from them. So they commanded them, that in case they would confirm their agreement and demonstrate their fidelity to them, who were of a different nation, they should go out of the city, with their families to a neighboring grove; and when they had done as they were commanded, without*

*suspecting anything, the people of Scythopolis lay still for the interval of two days, to tempt them to be secure; but on the third night they watched their opportunity, and cut all their throats, some as they lay unguarded, and some as they lay asleep. The number that was slain was above thirteen thousand, and then they plundered them of all that they had (Josephus, Wars, 2, 18, 3).*

Josephus makes a short reference to the incident in the speech of Eleazar Ben Yair on Masada (Wars 7, 8, 7). In his last book, *Life of Josephus*, the writer gives a different account of the participation of the Jews of Beth She'an in the defense of their gentile neighbors:

*Those that dwelt in the neighboring cities of Syria seized upon such Jews as dwelt among them, with their wives and children, and slew them, when they had not the least occasion of complaint against them; for they did neither attempt any innovation or revolt from the Romans, nor had they given any marks of hatred or treacherous designs towards the Syrians. But what was done by the inhabitants of Scythopolis was the most impious and most highly criminal of all; for when the Jews their enemies came upon them from without, they forced the Jews that were among them to bear arms against their own countrymen, which it is unlawful for us to do; and when, by their assistance, they had joined battle with those who attacked them, and had beaten them, after that victory they forgot the assurances they had given these their fellow citizens and confederates, and slew them all, being in number many ten thousands. (Josephus, Life. 6)*

In his description of the incident in *Wars*, Josephus relates that the Jews of Beth She'an defended the city alongside its other inhabitants and against the Jewish attackers. The version in *Life*, on the other hand, describes how the Jews of Beth She'an were forced by their neighbors to fight against their fellow-Jews. Gideon Fuks believes that the version in *Wars* is the correct one (Fuks 1983: 97), a view held by Aryeh Kasher as well (Kasher 1988: 259–260). Our current objective is not to discuss which of the two versions is the more credible reconstruction of the blood-letting in Beth She'an;<sup>8</sup> but the differences between the two versions are significant for the question of the character of the Jewish community in that city. In *Wars of the Jews*, Josephus describes a conformist community that conducted its relations with the city's gentile population on the basis of cooperation and common interests. Acceptance of that version draws a direct, logical line between two historical moments: the narrative in 2 Maccabees about Judah Maccabee, who refrained from attacking the city after its Jewish inhabitants spoke on behalf of their gentile neighbors; and – despite the century-long interval – Josephus's description of the violent clashes in Beth She'an on the eve of the Great Revolt, when the Jews of the city stood shoulder to shoulder with its gentile citizens against Jewish invaders.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Josephus relates that over 13,000 Jews of Beth She'an were murdered by their neighbors (Wars, 2, 18, 3). He almost certainly exaggerated the number of victims, as he did in other episodes (Broshi 1982: 23).

<sup>7</sup> The ossuaries were never published.

<sup>8</sup> On the differences between the versions in Josephus's two books, see Mason 2016: 70–73.

<sup>9</sup> The question of who were the Jews that attacked Beth She'an was dealt with by Kasher 1988: 260–261.

The peaceful relationship between the Jews of Beth She'an and its gentile inhabitants (2 Maccabees) deteriorated with time in the wake of the conquests by John Hyrcanos I and his sons. According to tradition, as it appears in *Megillat Ta'anit*, the gentile inhabitants of the town were forced to leave the city.<sup>10</sup> The Hasmonean conquests, and the policy of religious coercion they imposed on the gentile population, sowed the seeds of disaster in the country's complex human landscape, which would burst open in the coming generations, and climax in the events that preceded the Great Revolt (Kasher 1988: 123–124). The mutual suspicion between the two populations drove the gentiles to assault the city's Jews on the eve of the Great Revolt, even though they had fought side by side against Jewish rebels who had attacked the city. Josephus describes the clashes in Beth She'an at some length; and in order to emphasize the magnitude of the tragedy of the city's Jews, he adds the personal story of Shimon ben Shaul, a Jewish inhabitant:

*It will deserve our relation what befell Simon; he was the son of one Saul, a man of reputation among the Jews. This man was distinguished from the rest by the strength of his body, and the boldness of his conduct, although he abused them both to the mischieving of his countrymen; for he came every day and slew a great many of the Jews of Scythopolis, and he frequently put them to flight, and became himself alone the cause of his army's conquering. But a just punishment overtook him for the murders he had committed upon those of the same nation with him; for when the people of Scythopolis threw their darts at them in the grove, he drew his sword, but did not attack any of the enemy; for he saw that he could do nothing against such a multitude; but he cried out after a very moving manner, and said, 'O you people of Scythopolis, I deservedly suffer for what I have done with relation to you, when I gave you such security of my fidelity to you, by slaying so many of those that were related to me. Wherefore we very justly experience the perfidiousness of foreigners, while we acted after a most wicked manner against our own nation. I will therefore die, polluted wretch as I am, by mine own hands; for it is not fit I should die by the hand of our enemies; and let the same action be to me both a punishment for my great crimes, and a testimony of my courage to my commendation, that so no one of our enemies may have it to brag of, that he it was that slew me, and no one may insult upon me as I fall.' Now when he had said this, he looked round about him upon his family with eyes of commiseration and of rage (that family consisted of a wife and children, and his aged parents); so, in the first place, he caught his father by his grey hairs, and ran his sword through him, and after him he did the same to his mother, who willingly received it; and after them he did the like to his wife and children, every one almost offering themselves to his sword, as desirous to prevent being slain by their enemies; so when he had gone over all his family, he stood upon their bodies to be seen by all, and stretching out his*

*right hand, that his action might be observed by all, he sheathed his entire sword into his own bowels. This young man was to be pitied, on account of the strength of his body and the courage of his soul; but since he had assured foreigners of his fidelity [against his own countrymen], he suffered deservedly.* (Josephus, *Wars*, 2, 18, 4).

Josephus is well known for his extensive use of speeches as a literary device. It was a characteristic of historical writing in ancient times, as Thucydides, who used it extensively, confirms:

*What particular persons have spoken when they were about to enter into the war or when they were in it were hard for me to remember exactly, whether they were speeches which I have heard myself or have received at the second hand. But as any man seemed to me that knew what was nearest to the sum of the truth of all that had been uttered to speak most agreeably to the matter still in hand, so I have made it spoken here.* (Thucydides 1, 22).

John Thackeray divides the speeches in Josephus's writings into three categories: The first, small category contains speeches that are presumed to be closest to the original. The second category includes speeches of generals or leaders at exceptional moments, before or after a battle, for example. The third category is most relevant to our purpose. These are speeches that Josephus embedded in dramatic moments of the story. They are a product of the writer's imagination and designed either as propaganda or to heighten the drama of the event described (Thackeray 1967: 41–45). Menachem Stern put it well in his article on the suicide of Elazar ben Yair and his followers on Masada: 'The speeches,' he wrote, 'were intended as an explanation of the event, the state of mind that influenced the people involved, and the integration of the event and its sense of occasion in the general overall picture... and in that way to imbue the events with historical importance, or even meta-historical significance' (Stern 1982: 371–372). The short speech of Shimon ben Shaul is in a similar category. Josephus's intention was to enhance the tragedy of the Jews of Beth She'an on the one hand, but on the other hand to convey his own ideological message: Shimon 'confesses' his sin and chooses death for himself and his family rather than die by the sword of his enemies.

The motif of suicide is another literary device that Josephus weaves into his story of Shimon ben Shaul: suicide when all hope is lost, to avoid being taken alive.<sup>11</sup> This motif reaches its climax in the episode of Masada and the speech of Elazar ben Yair, but Josephus mentions other examples as well, among them the suicide pact in the cave at Yodefath (*Wars* 3, 8, 5–7) and incidents at Gamla (*Wars* 4, 1, 10).

The story of Shimon ben Shaul as related by Josephus, and the man's short speech before his suicide, was almost

<sup>10</sup> *Megillat Ta'anit* for 15th–16th of the month of Sivan (op. cit., note 4). Josephus gives two different accounts of the conquest of Beth She'an by the Hasmoneans: (a) *Wars*, 1, 2, 7; (b) *Antiquities* 13, 280. He makes no mention of the expulsion of the gentile population from the city.

<sup>11</sup> See Stern 1982: 377–387.

certainly a literary invention of the writer, although we cannot dismiss the possibility that the narrative had some basis in reality. The story presents the figure of a particular Jew from Beth She'an through Josephus's eyes, a figure that Josephus wants to share with his readers. Shimon ben Shaul, a powerful and bold-spirited man, was held in great awe. He did not hesitate to go out and fight his own people; and when his time came, he chose a death that would bring him glory.<sup>12</sup> Shimon ben Shaul became a symbol of the tragedy of the Jews of the city.

Beth She'an, Nysa-Scythopolis, a gentile city with a Hellenistic-Roman culture, presented a challenge to its Jewish inhabitants. It would seem that the Jews opted for a conformist accommodation with their gentile neighbors. So, it was in the time of Judah Maccabee, when they stood up for their neighbors and thereby averted any harm to the city, and so it was at the beginning of the Great Revolt, when they chose to stand with the city's gentile citizens. There were developments under Hasmonean rule between the two periods, however, which precipitated hostility and suspicion, and sealed the fate of the Jews who had remained loyal to their gentile neighbors.

The sources that offer insights into the Jewish community of Beth She'an in later generations are from rabbinic literature. The essentials of these sources, surveyed by Gideon Fuks, provide information about the renewal of the Jewish community in Beth She'an as early as the 2nd century AD (Fuks 1983: 150–155). It is not our purpose to reconstruct the history of the Jewish community of Beth She'an in the period of the Mishnah and Talmud, but rather to focus the discussion on those sources that can shed light on the nature of Jewish life in the city.

The Talmudic sources relate that in the time of Rabbi Judah *Ha-Nasi* (the Patriarch), Beth She'an was exempt from laws that uniquely pertained to Eretz Israel:<sup>13</sup>

*R. Zeira, R. Hiyya in the name of R. Yohanan: Rabbi [Judah the Patriarch] permitted produce bought in Bet She'an [to be eaten without first separating tithes]. This was at the word of Joshua b. Zeruz, son of R. Meir's father-in-law, who said, 'I saw R. Meir buying vegetables from the garden patch in the seventh year,' and Rabbi permitted the whole of the area. Said R. Zeira, 'That indicates that it is forbidden to someone to do anything in public [from which people might draw the wrong inference as to what is permitted]. I might have said, 'That garden-patch was set aside by [Meir] and Rabbi permitted all of the territory of Bet She'an.' Rabbi permitted produce sold in Bet She'an [to be eaten without separating tithes]. Rabbi permitted Caesarea. Rabbi permitted Bet Gubrin. Rabbi permitted Kefar Semah. Rabbi permitted buying vegetables immediately in the year following the seventh year [without taking account of the possibility that they may have taken root before the end of the seventh year], and everybody ridiculed him. He said to them, 'Come and let us conduct a reasonable dispute about this matter. It is written, "Hezekiah broke into pieces the bronze snake that*

*Moses had made, for until that time the Israelites had been offering sacrifices to it. It was called Nehushtan". [2 Kgs. 18:4] And did no righteous man arise from Moses to Hezekiah to remove it? But the Holy One, blessed be he, reserved for Hezekiah that crown with which to adorn himself. So too with regard to us, the Holy One, blessed be he, reserved for us this particular crown, with which to adorn ourselves'. (JT, Demai, 2 1, 22c).<sup>14</sup>*

The *sugya* is raised by R. Zeira, quoting his rabbis, R. Hiyya and R. Yohanan, who confirmed that the permission granted by Rabbi to eat vegetables of Beth She'an in the *Shevi'it* ('Seventh Year' -- *Shmitta*) was based on the precedent of R. Meir. R. Zeira proceeds to take issue with the permission and mentions the special garden-patch by virtue of which all of Beth She'an was 'permitted'. The author of the *sugya* names the four cities to which Rabbi gave permission, and then puts forward another permission of Rabbi 'to gather vegetables at the end of *Shevi'it*'. This permission arouses criticism, which Rabbi rejects with authority: '*the Holy One, blessed be he, reserved for us this particular crown, with which to adorn ourselves*' (Levine 2010: 17–22), meaning simply that God had granted him the authority to decide.

Rabbi's ruling was of great importance for Jews who lived on the periphery of Eretz Israel, areas that bordered strong gentile populations (Oppenheimer 2007: 74–83). These activities permitted by Rabbi have been the subject of extensive scholarly research.<sup>15</sup> The exemption obviously contributed to the strengthening of the Jewish community of Beth She'an (Fuks 1983: 152); but apart from substantial economic relief, it may be assumed that the exemption from *halachot* that apply to Eretz Israel greatly eased the relations between the Jews of Beth She'an and their gentile neighbors. They could now conduct their commercial relations on an equal basis.

The era after the revolts was one of significant reduction in tension between different sectors of the population in Eretz Israel. It may be assumed, therefore, that in the time of Rabbi Judah *Ha-Nasi*, who actively promoted normalization of relations between the Jews of Eretz Israel and the Roman regime, and between the Jews and their gentile neighbors, the Jewish community of Beth She'an enjoyed a revival. Something of the calm atmosphere is reflected in the observation of R. Shimon ben Lakish, an important *amora* of the 3rd century CE, that if the entrance to Paradise is in Eretz Israel, then Beth She'an is that entrance (*BT*, *Iruvin* 19a). A third-century sage could be amazed by the splendor of the city and its monumental buildings, as borne out by the impressive remains unearthed in archaeological excavations from the mid-1980s on; and, of course, by the richness and fecundity of the Beth She'an Valley, as R. Meir testifies (*BT*, *Ketuvot* 112a). It is unlikely that the image of Paradise would have been applied to a city in a constant state of inter-ethnic strife.

<sup>12</sup> On the choice of suicide, see Josephus (*Wars*, 3, 8, 5).

<sup>13</sup> For fuller treatment, see Levine 2010: 7–22.

<sup>14</sup> See also *BT*, *Hullin* 6b.

<sup>15</sup> See Bibliography: Levine 2010: 11, note 7.



Despite the importance of Nysa-Scythopolis, there are very few references to the city in rabbinic literature, and then always by its Hebrew name of Beth She’an. The references relate to several matters, some concerning the status of Beth She’an as a gentile enclave in Eretz Israel (*BT*, Hullin, 7a), in the context of exempting the city from the laws of the *Shevi’it*. Other texts deal with the linen industry of Beth She’an (*JT*, Kidushin, 5 4, 62c); but very few attest to the character of the city’s Jewish community.

Two sources in the Tractate Megillah of the Jerusalem Talmud mention the existence of a synagogue in the city.<sup>16</sup> Both texts, drawing on the Mishnah (Tractate Megillah, Chapter 3, *mishnayot* 1-3), address the *sugya* of the sanctity of the synagogue. The *sugya* in the Jerusalem Talmud discusses the sanctity of a city street, in light of the custom of reading the Torah in the street:

*Said R. Yohanan, ‘This represents the view of R. Menahem b. R. Yosé. For R. Menahem b. R. Yosé said, ‘The street of a town is subject to sanctification. For they take a scroll of the Torah out into the street and read it publicly there’.* (*JT*, Megillah, 3 1, 73d)

The *sugya* continues and discusses the rules of behavior that emerge from this position, especially preserving the sanctity of the place where they pray. That is the context in which the author of the *sugya* frames two questions about re-using the stones of a ruined synagogue to build a new one:

*People from Beisan [i.e., Beth She’an – author’s comment] asked R. Immi, ‘What is the law on buying stones from one synagogue for building another synagogue?’ He said, ‘It is forbidden’.* *Said R. Helbo, ‘R. Immi declared that it is forbidden, only because of the anguish [that will affect the people of the former synagogue, when it is torn down]’.* *R. Gurion said, ‘The people of Magdala asked R. Simeon b. Laqish, ‘What is the law on purchasing stones from one town to build up another town?’ He said to them, ‘It is forbidden’.* *R. Immi gave instructions, ‘Even [purchasing stones from] the eastern [part of a town for building up] the western [part of the town] is forbidden, because of the destruction [thereby inflicted] on that place [from which the building materials are purchased]’.* (*JT*, Megillah, 3 1, 73d)

The Jews of Beth She’an wished to consult with Rabbi Ammi (called Rabbi Immi in the Jerusalem Talmud), one of the most prominent *amoraim* in Eretz Israel at the end of the 3rd century and the beginning of the 4th century AD, and head of the *beit midrash* in Tiberias after the death of its rabbi, R. Yohanan (Hyman 1910: s.v). The question was whether the stones of a ruined synagogue could be used in the building of a new one. The people of Magdala, on the other hand, wanted the opinion of R. Shimon ben Lakish, a contemporary of R. Yohanan in the second half of the third century, as to whether such stones could be taken from one town to another. Both R. Immi and Resh Lakish

ruled that re-using stones from a destroyed synagogue was forbidden. For the petitioners of Magdala and Beth She’an, seeking a ruling from a leading sage based in the *beit midrash* of Tiberias was not only a matter of geographical proximity, but also because of the status of that *beit midrash* as the most important center of Torah study in Eretz Israel since the days of Rabbi Judah *Ha-Nasi* (Rozenson 1998: 193, 195).<sup>17</sup> The account gives no hint of the circumstances of the destruction of the Beth She’an synagogue,<sup>18</sup> but there is another mention of the synagogue further down the same chapter. The text begins with a *baraita*:

*[In] synagogues [and batei midrash] they do not behave frivolously. They do not eat or drink in them, nor do they sleep in them, nor do they take a stroll in them. One should not go into them on a hot day on account of the heat, or on a cold day because of the cold, or on a rainy day because of the rain. But they read [Scripture] in them, repeat [Mishnah-traditions] in them, and expound [Biblical lessons] in them.* (*JT*, Megillah, 3 4, 74a; *T. Meg.* 2:18).

The editor further added the opinion of R. Yehoshua ben Levi that sages and students had greater privileges in synagogues and *batei midrash*:

*R. Joshua b. Levi said, ‘Synagogues and schoolhouses belong to sages and their disciples’.*

The author of the *sugya* reinforces R. Yehoshua ben Levi’s opinion with three examples:

- a) *R. Hiyya bar Yosé received [guests] in the synagogue [and lodged them there].*
- b) *R. Immi instructed the scribes, ‘If someone comes to you with some slight contact with Torah-learning, receive him, his asses, and his belongings’.*
- c) *R. Berekhiah went to the synagogue in Beisan [i.e., Beth She’an]. He saw someone rinsing his hands and his feet in a fountain [in the courtyard of the synagogue]. He said to him, ‘It is forbidden to you [to do this]’.* *The next day the man saw [Berekhiah] washing his hands and feet in the fountain. He said to him, ‘Rabbi, is it permitted to you, and forbidden to me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes.’ He said to him, ‘Why?’ He said to him, ‘Because this is what R. Joshua b. Levi said: “Synagogues and schoolhouses belong to sages and their disciples”’.* (*JT*, Megillah, 3 4, 74a)

Of the three examples, the editor only specifies the location where the third one took place: the synagogue of Beth She’an. R. Berekhiah, an *amora* of the fourth generation of *amoraim* (mid-4th century AD), exploited his status as a sage when he rebuked a man for dipping his hands and feet in the water installation in the synagogue courtyard – the ‘basin’ (Levine 1991: 39–40). As he instructed the man the next day, that is the prerogative of sages alone.

<sup>16</sup> For the discoveries of synagogues in Beth She’an, see below.

<sup>17</sup> For the importance of *beit hamidrash* in Tiberias, see also: R. Eleazar said, ‘This one says, “In Tiberias,” and that one says, “In Sepphoris”;

they accept the position of the one who said, “In Tiberias” (*JT*, Sanhedrin, 3 2, 21a).

<sup>18</sup> Sussmann 1974: 88, note 2.

What can we derive from these two references about the Jewish community of Beth She'an? The purpose of the text was not to document the synagogues in the town. In the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods, the synagogue was an institution that existed wherever there was a Jewish community, and Beth She'an was no exception. There was almost certainly a synagogue in Beth She'an in the Second Temple Period, which was possibly destroyed in the turmoil of the Great Revolt. Nevertheless, the dilemma that the people of Beth She'an presented to R. Immi regarding the re-use of the stones of a ruined synagogue does not necessarily suggest a synagogue destroyed in the Great Revolt. Nor does the short text testify to a revival of the Jewish community in R. Immi's time (Fuks 1983: 153). The most we can glean from it is that Beth She'an had a Jewish community in R. Immi's day, that a synagogue had been built or was planned at that time, and that the Jews of the town, like the Jew from Magdala, were scrupulous about consulting an authority about the Jewish law (*halachot*) pertaining to its construction.

The second text tells us that there was a synagogue in Beth She'an in the days of R. Berekhiah, but not necessarily the very one referred to in the previous text. This text raises a particular dilemma about the character of Beth She'an's Jewish community. Does it confirm that customs regarding the special status of sages were respected in Beth She'an as well; or was it only the intervention of R. Berekhiah that made it clear to the man that he had violated an exclusive privilege of the sages. Another detail pertinent to the structure of the synagogue is the mention of the water basin in the courtyard (Levine 1991: 39–40).

Two synagogues have been discovered in Beth She'an, both of them dated later than the Jerusalem Talmud texts quoted above. One was identified as a Samaritan synagogue (Zori 1967: 149–167), the other a prayer hall within the complex known as 'the House of Leontis' (discussed below).

Among the texts from rabbinic literature in which Beth She'an is mentioned, I wish to expand on three that offer some illumination of the character of the Jewish community. Two of the texts are from the Mishnah, Tractate Avodah Zarah, and both include the formulation, 'This was the case with Beth She'an'. The third text is from Tractate Gittin in the Jerusalem Talmud and deals with permitting testimony from gentile witnesses.

Tractate Avodah Zarah deals with the subject of contact between Jews and pagans. 'The whole tractate of Avodah Zarah, which negotiates with idolatry and its adherents', writes Liberman, 'only suggests and discusses prohibitions and safeguards, but makes no effort to refute the underlying principles of idolatry' (Liberman 1984: 237). Chapter 1 of Tractate Avodah Zarah in the Mishnah begins with prohibitions of contact with pagans during their festivals:

*On the three days before the festivals of gentiles... it is prohibited to engage in business with them; to lend them*

*items or borrow items from them; to lend them money or borrow money from them; and to repay debts owed to them or collect repayment of debts from them (Mishnah Avodah Zarah, 1: 1).*<sup>19</sup>

Mishnah 2 (Mishnah Avodah Zarah, 1: 2) raises the question whether the three-day prohibition applies to the three days before the festival and three days after it, or only applies to the three days before the festival. Mishnah 3 lists the festivals during which contact with pagans is forbidden (Mishnah Avodah Zarah, 1: 3). Mishnah 4 deals with the prohibition on entering a city in which idolatrous rites take place, or entering a shop that is decorated:

*When an idolatrous [festival] takes place within a city, it is permitted [to transact business with heathen] outside it; if the idolatrous [festival] takes place outside it, [business] is permitted within it.*

*How about going there? If the road leads solely to that place, it is forbidden; but if one can go by it to any other place, it is permitted.*

*A city in which idolatry is taking place, some of its shops being decorated with garlands and some not decorated — **this was the case with Beth She'an** (author's emphasis), and the sages said: 'in the decorated ones it is forbidden [to buy] but in the undecorated ones it is permitted'.* (Mishnah, Avodah Zarah 1: 4).

Mishnayot 5-9 deal with the prohibition on selling or renting property to gentiles.

Mishnah 4, Chapter 1 (quoted above), presents three different issues:

1. A city in which there is idolatry and an idolatrous shrine, or, according to some interpretations (see below), a pagan festival: that city is forbidden. But if the shrine or the event is outside the city, the city is permitted but its environs are forbidden.
2. On the question of whether a Jew is permitted to go to the city, the Mishnah distinguishes between a road that is designated for a place of idol worship and is therefore prohibited, and a road that leads to the city as well as to the idolatrous site, in which case the road is permitted.
3. Similarly, entrance is forbidden to a shop that is decorated, but permitted to a shop that is not decorated. This is where the phrase 'this was the case with Beth She'an' appears.

Rashi's commentary on the Mishnah: 'a city in which there is idolatry' – 'there is a festival today for the pagans in the city' (Rashi on *BT*, Avodah Zarah, 11b); and wherever there is a mention of 'a city in which there is idolatry,' the intention is a pagan festival (Rashi on *BT*, 12a). Scholars have adopted this interpretation as well. Gideon Fuks, for example, writes in his chapter on 'The Cults of Scythopolis': 'And finally, we must mention two pagan festivals that were celebrated in Beth She'an, and are recalled in the Mishnah and the Talmud. In the Mishnah (Avodah Zarah 1: 4) we have found [here he quotes the

<sup>19</sup> See in greater detail: Friedheim 2006: 273–300.

Mishnah]... that is to say, the reference is to a specific pagan festival, on which some of the gentiles decorated their shops with garlands,’ – and he adds – ‘The exact nature of the festival is unclear, since decorating with garlands was common on many pagan festivals’ (Fuks 1983: 88).

I suggest that Chapter 1 in Tractate Avodah Zarah deals with two separate subjects. The first, which includes *mishnayot* 1-3, relates to avoiding contact between Jews and gentiles on pagan festivals.<sup>20</sup> The second, which includes *mishnayot* 4-9, deals with restrictions on various aspects of business relations with gentiles, not necessarily on pagan festivals. Some do in fact relate to pagan rites, like the prohibition in Mishnah 5 on selling a white rooster to a gentile, but it is permitted to do so once a blemish has been inflicted on the bird so as to make it unfit for pagan sacrifice. However, even the *mishnayot* that do address idolatry do not relate to any specific festival.

What, then, are ‘decorated shops’? The *sugya* in the Babylonian Talmud presents a dispute between Resh Lakish and R. Yohanan:

*Mishnah. A city in which idolatry is taking place, some of its shops being decorated with garlands and some not decorated — this was the case with Beth She’an, and the sages said: ‘in the decorated ones it is forbidden [to buy], but in the undecorated ones it is permitted.’*

*Gemara. Said R. Simeon b. Lakish: ‘this only refers to [shops] decorated with garlands of roses and myrtle, so that he enjoys the odor, but if they are decorated with fruit, it is permissible [to buy in them]. The reason is this: Scripture says, “there shall cleave naught of the devoted thing to thy hand”; hence it is to derive an enjoyment that is forbidden’.*

*But to confer enjoyment [or profit] is permitted. But R. Yohanan said: ‘even if they are decorated with fruit they are also forbidden, by an induction from the minor to the major, thus: if it is forbidden to enjoy [the odor of idolatrous articles], how much more so should it be forbidden to confer a benefit [which will be applied to such purpose]!’ (BT, Avodah Zarah 12b-13a).*

Resh Lakish was of the opinion that the Mishnah forbade entering shops decorated with roses and myrtle, which have a strong fragrance and give pleasure to whomever enters the shop. On the other hand, entering shops decorated with fruit was not forbidden, since the person entering does not derive pleasure from them. R. Yohanan believed that they too are forbidden.

Further into the *sugya* in the Babylonian Talmud, another question arose, relating to daily life in a city with a mixed population:

*R. Nathan says: ‘On the day when remission is made of the usual tax towards idolatrous purpose, the proclamation is*

*made: “Whosoever will take a wreath and put it on his head and on the head of his ass in honour of the idols, his tax will be remitted; otherwise his tax will not be remitted!” How should the Jew act who is present there? Shall he put it on? That means that he is enjoying [the remittance of tax – author’s emphasis]! Shall he not put it on? Then he confers a benefit [of paying tax towards idolatry]! Hence it was said: “If one buys aught in a market of idolaters, if it be cattle it should be disabled, if fruit, clothes or utensils, they should be allowed to rot, if money or metal vessels he should carry them to the Salt Sea”’. (BT, Avodah Zarah 13a).*

This dilemma highlights the difficulties facing Jews who lived in cities with a gentile majority and pagan shrines.

There is, however, another possible meaning of ‘decorated shops.’ In the *Aruch ha-Shalem*, the entry for the word *atr* (‘decorate’) relates, among other meanings, to ‘architectural decoration’: ‘and it is like a garland around the oven or the window’ (ibid., 188–189). Something about that kind of decoration on a building can be learnt from Mishnah 1, Chapter 14, in Tractate Ohaloth. This *mishnah* discusses the question of uncleanness of a tent under a projecting canopy at the entrance of a house, and the size of an opening that allows uncleanness to radiate from the interior of the house to beneath the projecting canopy, or the reverse, from beneath the canopy into the house:

*A canopy forms a passage for the uncleanness, be it of whatsoever width; but a balcony or rounded [projection only] when they are one handbreadth wide. What is a canopy? That [projection] whose [main] surface faces downwards, while a balcony has its [main] surface facing upwards... cornices and carvings form a passage for the uncleanness when they are one handbreadth wide. (Mishnah, Ohaloth 14: 1)*

According to Maimonides (Commentary on Mishnah Ohaloth, 14: 1), it was customary to make reliefs above the entrance in stone or plaster. Reliefs and sculptures that decorated entrances to houses were very common in the Roman world and in Eretz Israel. We therefore assume that ‘decorated shops’ were shops that were adorned with reliefs or paintings using pagan motifs, not necessarily to celebrate a particular event or festival. Entry to such shops was forbidden.

Rules of behavior relating to cities with a pagan majority are to be found in various places in Talmudic literature; some of the *halachot* concern pagan festivals (*Tosefta*, Avodah Zarah, 1: 3). Other rulings, the purpose of which was to avoid contact between Jews and pagan worship, do not necessarily relate to a particular festival, but rather have to do with ‘appearances,’<sup>21</sup> as in the following example:

<sup>20</sup> On pagan festivals, see Friedheim 2004: 47–72.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Appearance’ or ‘false impression’ is prohibited by *halacha*, i.e., performing an act that is not in itself a violation of *halacha*, but may be perceived as such.

*Our Rabbis taught: It is forbidden to enter a city while idolatrous worship is taking place therein — or [to go] from there to another city; this is the opinion of R. Meir. But the Sages say, only when the road leads solely to that city is it forbidden; if however the road does not lead exclusively to that place it is permitted. If a splinter has got into his [foot] while in front of an idol, he should not bend down to get it out, because he may appear as bowing to the idol; but if not apparent it is permitted. If his coins got scattered in front of an idol he should not bend and pick them up, for he may be taken as bowing to the idol; but if not apparent it is permitted. If there is a spring flowing in front of an idol he should not bend down and drink, because he may appear to be bowing to the idol; but if not apparent it is permitted. One should not place one's mouth on the mouth of human figures, which act as water fountains in the cities, for the purpose of drinking; because he may seem as kissing the idolatrous figure. So also one should not place one's mouth on a water pipe and drink therefrom for fear of danger. (BT, Avodah Zara 12a).*

The collection of incidents listed in this text represent those that could happen in gentile cities on any day of the year. The *halacha* makes allowance for dealing with these daily situations in a city in which there is pagan worship, and not necessarily on a pagan festival.

Mishnah 4, Chapter 1, of Tractate Avodah Zarah puts forward Beth She'an as an example of a city in which there is pagan worship, and both decorated and undecorated shops, using the formula 'this was the case with Beth She'an.' The phrase 'this was the case' is frequently used in the Tosefta and Babylonian Talmud in sentences that present a *halachic* dilemma; the phrase indicates a past incident that could serve as a precedent.<sup>22</sup> In numerous places in the Tosefta, the phrase 'this was the case' is followed by 'and they came to consult the sages' (*Tosefta*, Ma'aser Sheni, 5 9; *Tosefta*, Avodah Zarah, 7 4 ff) or 'they came to inquire' from a certain sage (*Tosefta*, Kilaim 3 5). The text generally ends with the response of the sages: 'they said' or 'the sages said', 'they permitted,' 'they forbade,' or 'declared impure.' The Halacha-based *suzyot* referred to above represent a range of problems connected to *halachot* of kilaim (*Tosefta*, Kilaim, 3 5), marriage (*Tosefta*, Kidushin, 3 6; *JT*, Kidushin, 2, 52b), ritual slaughter (*Tosefta*, Hullin, 2 4; *BT*, Hullin 10a; *BT*, Hullin, 28a); and so on. The place where the incident under discussion occurred is rarely mentioned.

In the Mishnah tractate of Avodah Zarah, Beth She'an is mentioned as the place where two separate incidents of a particular case occurred (1 4; 4 12)<sup>23</sup>, and Tractate Hullin of the Tosefta and the Babylonian Talmud records Caesarea as the place where another case took place

(*Tosefta*, Hullin, 2 13; *BT*, Hullin, 39 72). Apart from Caesarea and Beth She'an, other incidents that were described using the phrase 'that was the case' happened in Kfar Sugni (*Tosefta*, Kelim [Baba Kamma], 4 4) and Ohaliah (*Mishnah*, Eduyot, 7 4; *BT*, Zevachim, 25).<sup>24</sup>

The texts that mention Beth She'an and Caesarea deal with the separation of Israel from the gentiles:

- (a) *A city in which idolatry is taking place – some of its shops being decorated with garlands and some not decorated – this was the case with Beth She'an, and the sages said: in the decorated ones it is forbidden [to buy], but in the undecorated ones it is permitted (Mishnah, Avodah Zarah 1: 4).*
- (b) *If [an Israelite] prepares a heathen's wine in a state of ritual purity and leaves it in [the latter's] domain who writes for him 'I have received the money from you,' then [the wine] is permitted. If, however, the Israelite wished to remove it, and [the heathen] refuses to let it go until he paid him – this actually happened in Beth She'an and [the rabbis] prohibited it (Mishnah, Avodah Zarah 4: 12).*
- (c) *The following [Baraita] was taught in support of the view of R. Yohanan: If a person [an Israelite] slaughtered an animal with the intention [expressed during the slaughtering] of sprinkling the blood or burning the fat unto idols, it is regarded as a sacrifice unto the dead. If he slaughtered it and afterwards expressed his intention — this was an actual case which occurred in Caesarea and the Rabbis expressed no opinion with regard to it, neither forbidding nor permitting it. R. Hisda explained. They did not forbid it in deference to the view of the Rabbis, and they did not permit it in deference to the view of R. Eliezer (BT, Hullin, 39b; cf. Tosefta, Hullin 2 13).*

As previously mentioned, 'a city in which there is idolatry' is not necessarily connected to the celebration of a pagan festival; it could be any city that has a pagan shrine. Similarly, decorated shops could be shops decorated with reliefs or paintings of pagan motifs, and not necessarily shops decorated for a particular festival. The Mishnah directs the Jew how to behave in a city like that, and Beth She'an is the example given.

The mishnah that deals with the purification of the wine of a gentile presents a real-life picture. The wine belongs to a gentile, but is made by an Israelite who is in a state of ritual purity, which is to say that the gentile did not touch the wine during the wine-making process. If, in this situation, the gentile confirms that he has received payment for the

<sup>22</sup> The *midrash Lekach Tov (Pesikta Zotrata)*, written in the 11th century, offers a different use of the formula 'this was the case.' Here too the formula serves to recall an event that occurred in the past, but not one that raised a *halachic* problem.

<sup>23</sup> An additional citation is found in printed editions of the Babylonian Talmud: "R. Huna quoted against R. Ashi: If he took a cask and, in his anger, threw it into the vat — *this actually happened in Beth-She'an*, and [the rabbis] declared it fit [for drinking]!" (*BT*, Avodah Zarah 60a).

A close examination of sources revealed that the reference to Beth Shean appears in all the printed editions of the Talmud, but in only two manuscripts: Paris 1337, and Bologna, AS. Fr. Ebr.93.

<sup>24</sup> Ohaliah is identified by Horowitz with the Arab village of Beitillu, north-east of Ramallah (Horowitz 1923: 22).



wine, the wine now belongs to the Jew and is considered ritually pure. This is because the transaction is completed, and there is no concern that the gentile will touch the wine and thereby make it unusable for Jews. If, on the other hand, the purchase of the wine by the Jew has not been completed, there is concern that the gentile will regard the wine as his own. He may touch it and thereby make it unpermissible. This is the case that occurred in Beth She’an, leading the sages to disallow the wine.

The *sugya* reveals a complex commercial relationship: the gentile owns the vineyard and the grapes, but every stage of the wine-making is performed by Jews in order to make the wine acceptable for Jewish use. This wine is therefore intended for the Jewish market and must be sold to a Jew. The conclusion of the transaction between the Jew and the gentile guarantees that the wine is pure, because the gentile seller will not want to compromise the transaction, although the wine may remain in his house or his storeroom. If the transaction has not been completed, the gentile might touch the wine, which was made in compliance with Jewish ritual purity but still belongs to him, thereby making it impure for use by Jews (*BT*, Avodah Zarah 61a). Such commercial arrangements could develop in cities with a mixed population, like Beth She’an.

The other two texts, from Tractate Hullin in the Tosefta and Babylonian Talmud, are slightly different versions of the same *halacha*, which deals with the laws of ritual slaughter. *Mishnayot* 8-10 in Chapter 2 of Tractate Hullin in the Mishnah address the issue of slaughter connected to – or could be perceived as being connected to – cults of rivers, trees, and so on. Slaughter for such a purpose is forbidden. Chapter 2 in the Tosefta also deals with forbidden slaughter, and sections of the *halachot* in the Mishnah that prohibit slaughter for idolatrous purposes are found in this chapter as well (*Tosefta*, Hullin 2 19). Among the *halachot* in the Tosefta that do not appear in the Mishnah is an explicit prohibition of slaughter for pagan worship (*Tosefta*, Hullin 2 18).

*Halacha* 13 discusses slaughter for idolatrous purposes:

*If a person [an Israelite] slaughtered an animal with the intention [expressed during the slaughtering] of sprinkling the blood or burning the fat unto idols, it is regarded as a sacrifice unto the dead. If he slaughtered it and afterwards expressed his intention... this was an actual case which occurred in Caesarea and the Rabbis expressed no opinion with regard to it, neither forbidding nor permitting it. (Tosefta, Hullin, 2 13).*

The Tosefta and the *baraita* in the Babylonian Talmud, which deal with the prohibition of slaughter intended for pagan ritual, list different stages in the process of burnt offerings: spraying the blood on the altar (Ganzel 2008:

49–51) and burning the fat.<sup>25</sup> In this context, with the help of the phrase ‘this was the case’, they describe an incident that occurred in Caesarea. Since the *halacha* prohibiting such slaughter was unequivocal, why did the sages not apply the strict ruling as required by *halacha*, or, alternatively, permit it in contradiction of *halacha*? The difficulty becomes clear with the aid of a *sugya* in the Babylonian Talmud: ‘He slaughtered and then thought about it; this was a case in Caesarea’ (Hullin, 39b). It transpired that the opinions of the sages were divided in a case in which the slaughter was not from the outset intended for idolatrous purposes, or that the slaughter was performed by an Israelite for a gentile who intended the organs of the beast for pagan ritual. As the *sugya* progressed, the following incident was mentioned:

*Certain Arabs once came to Zikonia<sup>26</sup> and gave the Jewish butchers some rams to slaughter, saying: ‘The blood and the fat shall be for us, while the hide and the flesh shall be yours’.* (*BT*, Hullin 39b).

In this case as well, reality can be discerned between the lines of the text. In a mixed city, or in a city with a clear pagan character in which there was a Jewish community – like Caesarea, or Zikonia in Babylon where the case occurred – business contacts between them would be a natural development. The case of the animal slaughter is not unusual in itself, but sometimes the meat would be used for cultic rituals.

It seems, therefore, that the three texts (‘this was the case with Beth She’an / Caesarea’) reflect situations with which Jews living in those gentile-pagan cities had to cope. The list of regulations in Chapters 6 and 7 of Tractate Avodah Zarah in the Tosefta, deliver this exact message, even if it was not specifically said about Beth She’an and Caesarea. Sages worked to reconcile *halacha* and the pagan reality, in order to provide Jewish inhabitants or those passing through with tools to enable them to live as Jews in a pagan environment. Beth She’an and Caesarea, both with Jewish communities, became examples for other mixed cities.

A similar dilemma rises from the following text, from Tractate Gittin in the Jerusalem Talmud:

*Said R. Aha, ‘A lenient rule has been applied to documents which are drawn up in gentile registries’.<sup>27</sup> If that is the case, then even if both of the signatories are Samaritans [the documents] should be accepted? The reason is that he maintains that they are not experts in the rules governing the preparation of writs of divorce. But lo, R. Simeon declares valid writs of divorce prepared by them. R. Ba in the name of R. Zeira: ‘R. Simeon’s statement accords with the view of R. Eleazar. Just as R. Eleazar has said, “Even though there is no testimony of witnesses on the document, the document is valid,” so R. Simeon said, “Even though there is no [valid] testimony of witnesses on the document,*

<sup>25</sup> The fat was burnt on the altar. Eating the fat was strictly forbidden; and the priests and the people were forbidden to eat from the sacrifice until the fat had been burnt (Levine and Paran 2002: 25).

<sup>26</sup> A town near Pombadita (Obermeyer 1929: 234).

<sup>27</sup> On the concepts of ‘ערכאות’ and ‘ארביים’, see Furstenberg 2018: 33, note 30.

*it is valid". If so, then even if it was prepared by unauthorized people [and no authorized judges], the writ of divorce should be deemed valid? What is demanded once more is the reason stated by R. Jacob bar Aha: "A lenient rule has been applied to documents drawn up in gentile registries"'.*

*A writ was produced in Beth She'an, the signatories on which were two gentiles.*

*R. Yosé says, 'There was a dispute in this matter between R. Yohanan and R. Simeon b. Laqish. "One said that it was invalid, and one said that it was valid". R. Abbahu spelled out that it was R. Yohanan who said it was invalid and R. Simeon b. Laqish who said it was valid. What is the basis for the ruling of R. Simeon b. Laqish? It was so as not to cause a monetary loss to an Israelite [creditor]. But even if this party has no loss, that party [the debtor] will suffer a loss?' Said R. Yudan, 'But it was so as not to lock the door before people, for tomorrow [the borrower] will want to borrow money, and the other party [creditor] will not give out money [on the basis of such a document of loan, if the only available witnesses are gentiles]'. (JT, Gittin 1 4, 43d).*

Life in Eretz Israel in the Roman period, especially in mixed cities, raised judicial dilemmas that derived from the existence of parallel judicial systems: the Jewish one, the Roman one, and the municipal one (Alon 1947: 108; Furstenberg 2018: 21; Safrai 2000). Tannaitic sources contain an explicit prohibition of going to gentile courts, as in a *baraita* in Tractate Gittin of the Babylonian Talmud:

*It has been taught: R. Tarfon used to say: 'In any place where you find heathen law courts,<sup>28</sup> even though their law is the same as the Israelite law, you must not resort to them since it says, "These are the judgments which thou shalt set before them," that is to say, 'before them and not before heathens'. (BT, Gittin 88b).*

In practice, the Jews needed the gentile law courts. Yair Furstenberg describes the process whereby this judicial pluralism had a moderating effect on the different systems. It was a process that emerged from the needs of the local population in the provinces, and of Roman administrative interests (Furstenberg 2018: 22). Furstenberg expands the subject and describes the process of adaptation of the sages to the Roman and gentile judicial systems (op. cit. 22–23). In judicial matters, the question of deeds occupies a special place. 'There is no doubt', wrote Safrai, 'that people needed the writing of deeds in the gentile courts' (Safrai 2000), and he points out that the discussion about permitting deeds written in gentile courts began with the Yavne generation. The Tosefta indicates that loans, and purchase or sale of property, required a written document, submitted to the municipal authorities (*Tosefta*, Mo'ed Qatan 1 12; *Tosefta*, Avodah Zarah 1 8, 6 2).

Registration of deeds of loan, and purchase or sale of immovable property, in a gentile court was a common administrative procedure that was accepted by the sages (Furstenberg 2018: 33). All financial deeds submitted to gentile courts, and signed by gentiles, were considered valid:

*All documents which are accepted in heathen courts, even if they that signed them were gentiles, are valid [for Jewish courts], except writs of divorce and of emancipation. R. Simeon says: these also are valid; they were only pronounced [to be invalid] when drawn up by unauthorized persons (Mishnah, Gittin 1: 5).*

The validity of gentile witnesses was a primary issue that reflects a process of acceptance of the Roman judicial system by the sages. This had particular ramifications in cities with a mixed population or a gentile majority. A text in Tractate Gittin of the Jerusalem Talmud describes a precedent of a deed that was signed in a court in Beth She'an and witnessed by gentile witnesses. R. Yohanan invalidated the deed, while Resh Lakish validated it. In light of the dispute, the sages seek to clarify the reasoning of Resh Lakish in accepting the deed.

Two opinions emerge in the *sugya*. The first of R. Abbahu, 'was so as not to cause a monetary loss to an Israelite [creditor]. But even if this party has no loss, that party [the debtor] will suffer a loss.' Rabbi Yudan's response was more explicit: 'it was so as not to lock the door before people, for tomorrow [the borrower] will want to borrow money, and the other party [creditor] will not give out money' (JT, Gittin 1 4, 43d). Invalidation of gentile witnesses in financial dealings could, in the future, place the inhabitants of the city in a position of being refused loans, with resultant economic distress. This is clearly a real-life *sugya* that reflected day to day reality of the Jews in Beth She'an and other similar cities.

There are not many texts in rabbinic literature that relate to the Jewish community of Beth She'an, but those that exist reflect the situation of Jews in a Hellenistic-Roman city, adapting and finding solutions for life in the shadow of a pagan culture. The *halachot* applicable to a pagan city provided tools to help a Jewish person function in a pagan environment. Beth She'an and Caesarea were important cities with just such a character, and both had Jewish communities. In contrast to Caesarea, however, which was home to important sages like R. Abbahu, the leading *amora* of his generation (Levine 1973), the sources do not mention a single sage from Beth She'an. Nevertheless, the opinion sought by Jews from Beth She'an from a sage in Tiberias was not a feature of Beth She'an alone, as we have seen. The center in Tiberias was the most important in the Galilee, and attracted Jews from villages and towns in the region.

Beyond the evidence of Talmudic sources, two 5th century AD mosaic floors from the house of Leontis, discovered in

<sup>28</sup> For the meaning of the word 'אגריאות', see Furstenberg 2018: 26, note 12.

an archaeological excavation, provide some insight into the character of the Jewish community of Beth She'an at the time. The first stage of the excavation was directed by Nehemiah Zori in 1964, ahead of construction in the town's Shikun 'A' neighborhood. At Stratum V, the archaeologists unearthed three rooms in a wing of a mansion built around a central courtyard. A mosaic floor was discovered in the largest, north-westerly of the rooms, bearing inscriptions that included the name 'Leontis,' the owner of the house: 'the House of Leontis' has become its sobriquet ever since (Zori 1973: 229–231). At a later stage, again because of planned construction at the site, part of the courtyard and the south-western wing of the complex came to light, revealing a small 'prayer room', decorated by a mosaic carpet (Bahat 1972: 58).<sup>29</sup>

The mosaic floor discovered by Zori aroused a great deal of interest because of its range of subjects from Classical culture. The mosaic carpet was divided into three panels that Zori described in detail (1973: 231–233). In the upper part of the damaged upper panel is a mythological scene, well known from Homer's *The Odyssey*. Odysseus stands strapped to the mast of a ship (*Odyssey*, 12, 50–52; 160–162; 178–179). Below him is a naked female figure riding a sea monster, and below them an additional mythological scene: a ship, a man spearing the monster, and opposite him a Siren playing a flute. Between the Siren's head and the edge of the rolled-up sail is a two-lined inscription in Greek:

Κ(ύρι)ε β(ο)ήθ(ει) Λέοντι Κλούβ(α)

'Lord, help Leontis Kloubas' (Zori 1973: 234; Roth-Gerson 1987: 34–35).

In the center of the middle panel is a medallion with an eight-line Greek inscription and a five-branched *menorah*. The central medallion is surrounded by 26 birds, each adorned with a ribbon around its neck (Zori 1973: 233):

Μνήσθη / εις αγαθόν κ(αῖ) (ε)ῖς / εὐλογίαν ὁ

Κύρ(ιος) Λεόντις / ὁ Κλούβας ὅτι ὑπέρ *מנרה*

σ<ω>τηρίας αὐτοῦ κ(αῖ) / τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ

Ἰωναθα / ἐψήφ<ω>σεν τὰ ὅδε / ἐξ<ι>δ<ι>ων

'Be remembered for good and for praise Kyrios Leontis Kloubas because he paved this mosaic at his own [expense] for his own salvation and that of his brother Jonathan' (Zori 1973: 236; Roth-Gerson 1987: 37–38).<sup>30</sup>

The upper part of the lowest panel comprises a Nilotic scene: the dominant figure of the Nile god, the city of Alexandria (with an identifying inscription), and a Nilometer. The Nile god leans on an upturned vessel from

which a stream of water flows, creating a river at the bottom of the panel. A boat sails on the water, with a man on the deck, two more birds, and fish (Zori 1973: 233).<sup>31</sup>

The central motif of the mosaic floor of the prayer room in the south-western wing is a vine scroll in an amphora, creating medallions inhabited by creatures (birds, goats and bears), arranged in three rows of three medallions each (Bahat 1972: 57–58).<sup>32</sup> The central medallion contains a seven-branched *menorah*. Such mosaic floors, with vine medallions containing creatures, are well known from synagogues and churches of the period (Hachlili 2008: 111–148). The importance of this find is its confirmation of the House of Leontis as a Jewish complex. The medallion panel is encompassed by two wide frames. The corners of the inner frame are graced with pitchers, from which ivy branches extend and embrace depictions of the hunter's prey. On the north side of the frame is a *tabula ansarta* with a four-line inscription in Aramaic:

דכירין לטב כל בני חבורתה קדישתה

דהגון מתחזקין בתקונה דאתרה

[קדי]שה ובשלמה תהוי להון ברכתה אמן

... רוב שלום וחסד שלום

'Remembered be for good all the members of the Holy Congregation

who endeavored to repair the holy place.

In peace shall they have their blessing.

Amen!... Peace! Piety in peace!' (Bahat 1972: 57; Naveh 1978: 77–78).

Three sides of the inner frame are surrounded by a wider frame containing a series of diamond shapes, formed by similar-shaped flowers, and inhabited by baskets, vases and birds. The fourth side is adorned by another Aramaic inscription, flanked by two birds with crests, which look as if they are drinking from a fountain. The inscription is read facing north, but, intriguingly, the birds and the fountain are viewed facing south. The inscription acknowledges the mosaic artist:

דכיר לטב אומנה דעבד חדה אבדתה<sup>33</sup>

'Remembered be for good the artist who did this work' (Bahat 1972: 57; Naveh 1978: 78–79).

Another inscription in Greek, flanked by two birds, was found beyond the eastern side of the frame:

Π(ροσ)φ(ορά) ων Κ(ύριος) γ[ινόσκι τὰ ] ονόματ]α αὐτος ]  
φυσλάξι ἐν ] χρο(νω).

<sup>29</sup> Dan Bahat changed his mind about the plan of the synagogue once the excavation was completed: only p. 58 of his article remains relevant here.

<sup>30</sup> On Leontis's occupation, see: Zori 1973: 234; Roth-Gerson 1987: 165.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed discussion of the components of Nilotic scenes in mosaic floors, see: Hachlili 2008: 101–106.

<sup>32</sup> On the motif of the inhabited vine medallions and their development, see: Hachlili 2008: 111–14; Dauphin 1987: 183–212.

<sup>33</sup> On the replacing of the Hebrew letter *ayin* by the Hebrew letter *alef* in the word 'אבדתה', see remarks by Bahat 1972; Naveh 1978: 79; Fuks 1983: 150.



The gift of those of whom the Lord knows the names, He shall guard them, in time... (Roth-Gerson 1987: 41).

Roth-Gerson notes the distinctive character of the inscription, both its content and its style, by comparison with other synagogue inscriptions in Greek (Roth-Gerson 1987: 41–42).

The House of Leontis mosaic floor has attracted considerable scholarly interest because of the mythological scenes that appear in the upper panel, and the Nilotic scenes in the lower one.

In an article published in 2003, Ze'ev Safrai contributed that the mosaic floor was part of a public building owned by a Jewish-Christian. His contention rested on several main elements:

- (a) Leontis's nickname, Klouba. Zori and Roth-Gerson believed that it indicated the man's occupation, perhaps a bird-cage builder (based on the Greek). Safrai argued that it was a proper name, similar to a name mentioned by Epiphanius in his *Panarion*, as the leader of a heretical Christian sect. Safrai offered an explanation for the different spellings in the two contexts (Safrai 2003: 252–253).
- (b) Pagan motifs. Although pagan motifs are found in other synagogue mosaic floors, Safrai pointed out the exceptional intensity of such subject matter in the House of Leontis, and in particular the nudity of the Sirens. In his opinion, there is no precedent for this in the archaeology of synagogues (Safrai 2003: 246).<sup>34</sup>
- (c) Other elements to which Safrai called attention included the dove, which has significance in both the Jewish and the Christian world (Safrai 2003: 252–253); and the number 26 (the number of birds in the middle panel (Safrai 2003: 253–254).<sup>35</sup>

Most scholars who have discussed the floor of the House of Leontis do not accept Safrai's thesis and regard the complex as Jewish. A few scholars have offered a symbolic interpretation that integrates the three panels.

Zori suggested that the combination of mythological and Nilotic scenes could hint that Leontis and Jonathan, who are mentioned in the Greek inscriptions, might have been from Alexandria (Zori 1973: 238; Roth-Gerson 1987: 165). Zori added that the Nilotic scene could have been influenced by the vision of the biblical prophet Ezekiel, in which Pharaoh is likened to a crocodile (Ezekiel 29: 3–4, 32:2). Since Jews in Alexandria were influenced by Hellenistic culture (Hadas-Lebel 2006: 60–62, 73–76; Gruen 2004: 82–85, 232–250), it is a reasonable suggestion that Leontis, if indeed he hailed from Alexandria, might have chosen mythological scenes depicting Odysseus for the mosaic floor of his house. It is important to note, however, that mythological pagan

subjects have been found in mosaic synagogue floors elsewhere. An example is the image of the sun-God Helios, driving a chariot drawn by four horses, who appears in the central medallion of the wheel of the zodiac in several ancient synagogues (Dothan 1967), and Nile motifs were common in pagan and Christian mosaic art.

Roussin promotes the idea that the two pictorial panels are evidence of a process of eschatological syncretism in Jewish art (Roussin 1981: 6). The Nilotic mosaic is charged with eschatological significance, and the key to understanding it lies in the struggle of the bull, and the crocodile dragging it into the water. In this scene, she identifies the anticipated end-of-days struggle between *Behemoth* and *Leviathan* as the prelude to the messianic age (*Leviticus Rabba* 13 3; Roussin 1981: 7–9). The fact that the struggle is implanted in a Nilotic context bolsters Roussin's explanation of elements in the Nilotic scene: the Nilometer and the dominant presence of the Nile god. She does not expand on the Nilometer; but the Nile figure was implanted in early traditions in the Greco-Roman world. A detail unique to the House of Leontis mosaic is the goose or duck the Nile god holds in his outstretched hand. In 'choosing' a goose, Roussin sees another eschatological hint, this time in the role of geese in a future meal of the righteous, based on a short text in Tractate Baba Batra of the Babylonian Talmud (73a-b; Roussin, 1981, 12).<sup>36</sup> The Alexandria connection remains an enigma (Roussin 1981: 9).

Roussin maintains that there is a connection between the two pictorial panels, the Nilotic and the mythological, in the House of Leontis. An examination of the panels indicates that the owner of the house had knowledge of and familiarity with Jewish literature on the one hand, and Classic literature on the other (Roussin 1981: 12–13). Once she has noted the popularity of the subject of Odysseus and the Sirens in pagan art and points out the significance of the motif in Christianity, Roussin turns to the primary distinction of the scene in the House of Leontis: The Sirens, personifications of evil spirits, are replaced by Nereids, who symbolize eternity and escorting good souls to their eternal rest. The Odyssey panel is therefore an allegory of transition from this world to the world to come. Roussin assumes a coherent alignment of the panels, from the Odyssey scene in the upper panel, symbolizing the journey to the next world; through the inscription in the middle panel, which refers to the salvation of the souls of Leontis and his brother Jonathan; to the eschatological Nilotic scene in the lowest panel (Roussin 1981: 18). This is the same 'eschatological syncretism' created through use of popular motifs in the Roman world, now charged with new Jewish significance.

Galit Hasan-Rokem termed the mosaic floor of the House of Leontis a 'hermeneutical mosaic' (Hasan-Rokem 2014:

<sup>34</sup> This is a problematic assertion, considering Libra and Aquarius, both naked, in the zodiac at Hammat Tiberias, or the nude figures in the wall paintings of the Dura Europos synagogue (Fine 2001: 5–6; Moon 1992: 587–658).

<sup>35</sup> For a criticism of Safrai's article, see: Tolley, H. 2020. Revisiting the House of Leontis Klouba at Beth Shean/Scythopolis (academia.edu website, retrieved Nov. 3).

<sup>36</sup> When Roussin wrote her article, she could not have known the mosaic floor discovered in the "Nile House" in Zippori (Sepphoris), with a duck sitting on a flower at the foot of the Nile god.

159–189). The discussion in her article deals primarily with the transformation of the Siren from a female figure whose lower body is like that of a bird, to that of a mermaid whose lower body resembles a fish. One of the early references to the Siren as a mermaid is in rabbinic literature. Hasan-Rokem notes that the connection between the appearance of the Siren and the city of Alexandria is not coincidental. It was there that interpretive traditions of Homer developed, viewing the journey of Odysseus as the journey of the soul to the next world. “The Sirens,” she wrote, “are part and parcel of the Alexandrian imagination...” (Hasan-Rokem 2014: 186), and Alexandria should therefore be seen as the interpretive key to the mosaic. She sums up as follows:

*‘At this stage we can say with certainty that Leontis was affluent enough to engage superb artists, culturally informed to appreciate the Odyssey, maybe in a more contemporary version such as Ovid’s Metamorphoses. He was also a deeply believing man who sought the help of the Lord when sailing through the waves of life’* (Hasan-Rokem 2014: 187).

In her research, Nava Sevilla-Sadeh stresses that the subjects that appear in the mosaic floor of the House of Leontis are deeply rooted in Classical culture. Study of those roots may better explain the significance of the mosaic (Sadeh 2006: 204). In a comprehensive survey, and research of the various motifs of the mosaic in the context of the Classical world, she suggests the following analysis of the narrative of the entire mosaic floor:

The central subject of the two pictorial panels is the boat. Sadeh shows that in the Classic culture sailing was seen as the road to knowledge and wisdom. This is the way she interprets the sailing scene in the lower panel. The Sirens are an illusion of knowledge and wisdom. The figure of the Nile that reflects the image of the seer in Greek art, and the city of Alexandria, symbolize truth and wisdom. The journey of Odysseus, strewn with obstacles, was a journey to gain wisdom (Sadeh 2006: 204–208). Sadeh sums up as follows:

*‘This analysis of the Kyrios Leontis mosaic has thus demonstrated that even though the house in which the mosaic was placed was Jewish, the orientation is completely pagan, and that its owner and commissioner of the mosaic were deeply acquainted with the Classical artistic tradition and concepts’* (Sadeh 2006: 214).

Rachel Hachlili circulated the question as to whether the popular use of Nilotic scenes in pagan, Christian and Jewish contexts had any symbolic significance (Hachlili 2009: 106). She noted that most scholars believe that the Nilotic scenes were a kind of fashion – using exotic motifs solely for decorative purposes – and that the art is more a product of the artist’s imagination than a reflection of reality. The choice of a popular scene could tell more about the wealth of the owner of the house, with no allegorical significance at all (Hachlili 2009: op. cit., 106). In her own words:

*‘It seems likely that the themes and motifs in these Nilotic mosaic pavements, which were popular and used mainly for decoration, were taken from pattern books from which the artists or the clients could choose either the full Nilotic scheme or isolated motifs without relating any symbolic meaning to them and perhaps interpreting them as genre scenes’* (Hachlili 2009: op. cit., 109).

The House of Leontis was a Jewish villa, with a prayer room in one of its wings, but whether it was a public building, or a private home is still disputed. The exceptional mosaic floor in the north wing speaks of the owner’s connection with Hellenistic-Roman culture, but a scene from *The Odyssey* does not necessarily indicate that he knew the works of Homer, although those Greek works were known in Jewish circles (Lieberman 1984: 229–232). Similarly, the inclusion of a Nilotic scene is not proof of Leontis’s familiarity or connection with the city of Alexandria, and there is no evidence that he was well versed in Jewish literary traditions, as some scholars have suggested. It is difficult to define the combination of different scenes as having a purpose or some symbolic message.

I wish to offer another possibility. The owner of the house may have been shown the mosaic artist’s portfolio (as Rachel Hachlili suggested), and as a person familiar with Hellenistic-Roman culture, may have chosen themes that were popular for floor mosaics at the time: stories of Odysseus and the Sirens, and Nilotic scenes. His selection represented the cultural synthesis that was characteristic of the Jews in the pagan city of Beth She’an. The motifs of the mosaic, the Greek inscriptions, and the name of Leontis, indicate that he and his circle were drawn to the prevailing gentile fashions. But the existence of the prayer room, the *menorah* in the mosaic, the language and content of the Aramaic inscriptions, and Jonathan, the name of Leontis’s brother, tell us of their Jewishness.

To conclude: Examining the characteristics of Jewish life in Beth She’an through texts and the mosaic floor paints a picture of a community walking a tight-rope between its Jewishness and the pagan environment. Although the city did not produce sages, nor, almost certainly, were any of them based there, synagogues were built, and the Jews of Beth She’an scrupulously brought their questions of Jewish law to the sages in Tiberias, as did Jews from other places. In the face of challenges from the pagan world surrounding them, the sages evolved a system of *halachot* that instructed Jews how to conduct themselves in a gentile city; the Jews of Beth She’an were both involved in and influenced by that pagan culture.

Not only did the Jews of Beth She’an represent an example of a synthesis between their Jewish world and a gentile culture, but they evidently saw themselves as an integral part of the city’s non-Jewish citizenry. This explains the support the Jews of Beth She’an extended to their neighbors in the Hasmonean war, and explains as well the tragic story of Shimon ben Shaul on the eve of the Great Revolt. Here was a Jew who fervently believed he was part of the human tapestry of Beth She’an, but the illusion blew

up in his face and that of his fellow-Jews when, despite their loyalty to the city, they were murdered by their neighbors.

This is the character of a Jewish community in a gentile-pagan city, paving a middle way between their Jewish culture and that of the non-Jews in whose presence they dwelt.

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# Beth She'an 'Beauties': An Introduction to the Sculptures from Roman and Byzantine Nysa-Scythopolis

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*One of the major—and certainly most visually alluring—contributions of Gabriel Mazor's tireless work at Beth She'an/Scythopolis is the discovery of a substantial corpus of Roman sculpture—some 168 fragments, nearly all carved in white marble. Along with the pieces discovered at the site by the Hebrew University excavations, these statues represent the second largest group of Roman marble statuary discovered in ancient Palestine. This essay provides an overview of all of the Roman sculptures discovered at Beth She'an with a focus on those found by Gaby and his Israel Antiquities Authority team. The goals are to celebrate Gaby and his team's discoveries, to provide a preliminary synopsis of the entire corpus that has not been possible to date, and to outline the important contributions to the realm of Roman sculptural studies (and related fields) that thorough study of the statues from Beth She'an will provide.*

KEYWORDS: SCULPTURE; STATUES; MARBLE; LIMESTONE; APHRODITE; HERAKLES; PORTRAITS; QUARRY SOURCES; POLYCHROMY; RECARVING; REUSE; HELLENISTIC; ROMAN; BYZANTINE; CHRISTIAN.

One of the major—and certainly most visually alluring—contributions of Gabriel Mazor's tireless work at Beth She'an/Scythopolis is the discovery of a substantial corpus of Roman sculpture—some 168 fragments.<sup>1</sup> Of these, nearly all (153) are carved in white marble, so that together with the pieces discovered by the Hebrew University team, the approximately 233 marble sculptures discovered in the city constitute one of only two major corpuses of Roman marble statuary from Israel (the other found at the port city of Caesarea Maritima).<sup>2</sup> Though publications of a handful of individual pieces have appeared over the years, identification of all of the fragments and study of this massive corpus as a whole has just begun.<sup>3</sup> This essay will provide an overview of the Roman sculptures discovered at Beth She'an by both the Israel Antiquities Authority and Hebrew University excavations, but with a focus on those found by Gaby and his team.<sup>4</sup> My goals are first to celebrate Gaby and his team's discoveries, second to provide a preliminary synopsis of the entire corpus that has not been possible to date, and finally to outline the important contributions to the realm of Roman sculptural studies (and related fields) that thorough study of the statues from Beth She'an will provide.

Most of the more than 250 statues are carved in white marble, however, the corpus also includes approximately

sixteen pieces carved in limestone, one in a local conglomerate stone, and one in a black or extremely dark blue, fine-grained stone. Though future scientific studies will no doubt reveal paint traces not visible to the naked eye, at least eleven of the white marble pieces preserve visible polychromy, most famously the slightly larger than life size Aphrodite now on display in the Israel Museum, which features numerous painted areas including the support depicting a dolphin-riding Eros with blue and yellow wings.<sup>5</sup> All pieces are worked in three-dimensions except for six fragments carved in relief (one of which is clearly the rim of a marble basin).<sup>6</sup> The pieces range in scale from miniature to colossal and include approximately eleven colossal fragments, nineteen heroic or over life size pieces, sixty life size or just larger than life size pieces, and sixty two statuettes or pieces that range in size from miniature to two-thirds life size (there are eighty-eight fragments for which scale is not determinable and thirteen for which it is not applicable). In terms of subject matter, the corpus includes both mythological figures (also known as ideal statues) and portraits. Preliminary assessment of style suggests that the pieces date from the Hellenistic to the Late Antique periods, with the majority of the pieces attributable to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. Though many of the pieces were discovered in later deposits in the Western and Eastern Bathhouses, statuary

<sup>1</sup> I am honored and delighted to have been asked by Gaby Mazor on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority and Benny Arubas on behalf of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to study and publish all of the sculptures discovered at the site of Beth She'an/Scythopolis. Because some of the pieces are on display or in storage at the Israel Museum, I am also indebted to David Mevorah for his support and input. At the time of writing this article, I have had only four weeks to work with the sculptures in person to begin my study, so this report is by necessity extremely preliminary. Future work (when the COVID-19 pandemic eases) may change some of the numbers, identifications, and ideas presented here.

<sup>2</sup> For the sculptures from Caesarea Maritima, see the numerous publications by that site's sculpture specialist, Rivka ('Ricky') Gersht, only a handful of which are cited in this essay.

<sup>3</sup> Previously published work related to the Beth She'an sculptures is included in the bibliographic references at the end of this essay.

<sup>4</sup> For the sculptures discovered at Beth She'an in the 1920s excavations and awarded to the University of Pennsylvania's museum as part of the division of finds, see Romano 2006: 189–202, cat. nrs. 93–101; Romano 2020. For the limestone funerary portraits from the site, see Skupinska-Løvset 1983.

<sup>5</sup> Foerster 2005, esp. 6; Porat 2005.

<sup>6</sup> For a limestone relief of Herakles discovered by the Hebrew University excavations counted among these six fragments, see Tsafir and Foerster 1994: 105; two altars with sculpted relief decoration (one marble and one limestone), not counted among the six reliefs mentioned here, are also illustrated in Tsafir and Foerster 1994: 98.

was found in contexts throughout the city, including in the Theater, the *Odeion*, and the Amphitheater, among others.

The Beth She'an corpus is important first and foremost because of the sheer number of sculptures discovered: next to the finds from Caesarea Maritima, they represent the second largest group of Roman marble statuary discovered in ancient Israel. In addition, as a group, these statues offer an unparalleled opportunity to address critical artistic, economic, cultural, and political issues at play both in the Near East and in the broader Roman Empire. In what follows, I will discuss some of the major contributions that careful study and analysis of the sculptural corpus from Beth She'an can provide, while introducing some of the pieces that were uncovered during the IAA excavations run by Gaby Mazor but have not yet been studied and published.



Figure 1. Capitoline/Medici Aphrodite (BSS 194), front. From the Eastern *aditus maximus* of the Theater, IAA excavations (photo by author). H: 0.545 m; W: 0.445 m; D: 0.23 m.

Because we know that marble does not occur geologically anywhere in the Roman Near East and therefore marble sculptures had to be imported to Roman Palestine (often fully-worked), a major goal of the larger Beth She'an/Scythopolis Sculpture Project will be to determine the artistic and material origins of the statuary: where and in what sculptural workshops were these pieces carved and

from what quarries did their marble come? Analyses of tool marks left on statues and technical details (such as the way the eyes, lips, and hair were carved) can associate pieces with specific sculptural traditions and provide information about which sculptural workshops likely created and shipped these pieces to Beth She'an. For example, a Capitoline/Medici Aphrodite (BSS-194; Figure 1) found in the 1988 IAA excavations of the Eastern *aditus maximus* of the Theater preserves a neck strut, a square block of marble that is not carved away, but left at the nape, perhaps to protect pieces during shipping.<sup>7</sup> These neck struts are most frequently associated with the sculptural workshops in Asia Minor, therefore it seems most likely that this Capitoline/Medici Aphrodite from Beth She'an was carved in one of the famous sculptural centers of Roman Turkey, like those at Ephesos, Aphrodisias, or Perge.<sup>8</sup> While other technical features of this piece may further narrow this workshop association, such artistic attributions can be tested and even further narrowed by conducting geochemical tests that reveal where the marble of the statues was quarried.

While a significant amount of work has been done in the past three decades on geochemical testing of white marble statuary discovered in the Roman Near East, only a handful of sculptures from Beth She'an have been tested and even fewer of those results have been published.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, extensive and systematic provenance testing of the marble of the Beth She'an sculptures is a priority. Not only will such testing provide important information about quarry origins for each individual piece, but when combined, the results can provide a range of further information. For example, as noted above, quarry origins can be correlated with technical features to strengthen or counter artistic attributions. In addition, specific scientific results can affirm sometimes questionable joins of now-broken pieces or provide further weight to an argument that non-joining fragments of similar scale, subject, and workmanship may be from the same piece due to being carved of the same marble. Further, the sculptures of the Beth She'an corpus are carved in a wide variety of types of white marbles, so provenance testing will be crucial for identifying the quarry origins of pieces, whether their marble is pure white, white with gray bands, or white with reddish gray veins, like the Base with a colossal, left sandaled foot (BSS-207; IAA# 055759; Figures 2-3). Finally, the handful of pieces that are not carved of white marble will also require archaeometric study to determine the origins of their stone, for example, a statuette preserving the Lower Portion of a Standing, Draped Female (BSS-036; Figure 4), which is carved in a black or dark blue stone.

<sup>7</sup> The Capitoline/Medici Aphrodite was found in L1316 under Byzantine I pavement (Stratum 10); see Sharvit 2015: 617-619.

<sup>8</sup> For the most recent discussion of the technical feature of neck struts, see Anguissola 2018: 88-89; 187-190.

<sup>9</sup> Geochemical testing of marble artifacts to determine the quarry origins of their marble has been developed over the past fifty years and today involves a multi-method approach that utilizes isotopic analysis in consort with other mineralogical and chemical studies. For a recent

review of the provenance determination of ancient white marble artifacts, see Al-Bashaireh 2021 and Pensabene and Gasparini 2015. For discussion of and bibliography on the quarry origins of marble artifacts discovered in the Roman Near East, see Friedland 2012: 60-62. For study of the quarry origins of the marble of three Beth She'an sculptures, see: Aphrodite from the Eastern Bathhouse: Nissenbaum 2005; Head of Athena and Ideal Female Head from Tel Naharon-Scythopolis: Pearl and Magaritz 1991.





Figure 2. Base with a colossal, left sandaled foot (BSS–207; IAA# 055759), front. IAA excavations (photo by author). H: 0.27 m; W: 0.445 m; D: 0.37 m.



Figure 3. Base with a colossal, left sandaled foot (BSS–207; IAA# 055759), detail of sandal. IAA excavations (photo by author). Foot: H: 0.06 m; W: 0.12 m; D: 0.30 m.

Though Beth She'an is located significantly inland, so clearly was not an import center or node for the broader, Mediterranean-wide imperial marble trade as Caesarea Maritima seems to have been, in the end, the artistic and material origins of the Beth She'an statues will establish further connections between this Decapolis city itself and specific, renowned sculptural workshops of the Roman



Figure 4. Lower portion of a standing, draped female (BSS–036), front. IAA excavations (photo by author). H: 0.30 m; W: 0.245 m; D: 0.125 m.

period, most likely in Greece and Turkey.<sup>10</sup> Such links will add new data to current research on trade and economic connections in the eastern Mediterranean in general and within Roman Palestine in particular.<sup>11</sup> In addition, at Beth She'an, because we have the sculptural remains from an entire city, we can attempt to examine patterns of trade and import. For example, do sources of statuary vary by functional context? In other words, although a good number of the pieces were discovered in a dump in the Western Bathhouse, can we discern any preference in ordering from one workshop for the sculptural decoration of the baths, but another for the display in the theater? Furthermore, can we detect shifts in trade connections over time, as Moshe Fischer has posited for the region, for example importing from Pentelikon and Paros in the Hellenistic period and then ordering from Aphrodisias and Proconessos in Turkey and to a lesser degree from Thassos in Greece during the second and 3rd centuries as well as in the Byzantine period?<sup>12</sup>

The subjects and sculptural types of the Beth She'an sculptures will offer exciting opportunities to compare how statuary was used in this Near Eastern civic center to patterns of sculptural display in metropolitan Rome as well as in more proximal eastern locales in Greece (Athens, Olympia, Corinth), Turkey (Ephesos, Aphrodisias, Perge, Sagalassos), and the Near East (nearby Caesarea Maritima, Gerash in Jordan, Baalbek in Lebanon, Palmyra in Syria). Preliminary work shows that, as noted above, the vast

<sup>10</sup> For the role of Caesarea Maritima in the imperial marble trade, see Gersht and Gendelman 2010.

<sup>11</sup> On trade in stone in the Roman Mediterranean, see Russell 2013; for the marble trade in Roman Palestine, see Fischer 1998, 2002, 2009b.

<sup>12</sup> Fischer 2009b.

majority of the assemblage depicts ideal or mythological subjects. While many of these ideal sculptures are so fragmentary that further study will be necessary to identify their original subjects (approximately twenty-five to thirty such fragments should be attributable to specific subjects and/or sculptural types), many of the pieces are so well-preserved that they are readily recognized. For example, female mythological figures already identified include Aphrodite, Athena, Tyche, a nymph, and Leda (with her swan), while males depicted include Herakles, Hermes, Dionysos, and Eros. The assemblage is so large that a few subjects are repeated. This is especially true for Aphrodite, of whom there are no fewer than ten representations in varying types and scales; Athena is depicted in three if not four pieces; and Herakles appears in at least five and perhaps six representations with further examples of the hero likely to be identified during future work. The preponderance of both Aphrodite and Herakles is not unusual given the association of many of the Beth She'an sculptures with two massive bathing facilities at the city center (Western and Eastern Bathhouses), since both were frequent subjects in this context.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the

appearance of Herakles in sculptural works from different contexts in the city, for example a relief carved in local limestone and local style depicting Herakles with the head of Medusa and the Hydra, may indicate that the hero had some special significance at some point in time at Beth She'an/Scythopolis.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of sculptural types, many of the Beth She'an pieces already identified echo or adapt mainstream, Graeco-Roman types and styles as do other sculptures discovered in Roman Palestine.<sup>15</sup> For example, the Aphrodite already noted above (see Figure 1) may be broadly classified as a Capitoline or Medici Aphrodite based on its posture and gesture that create the standard *pudica* pose, in which the figure turns her head slightly toward the left, holds her right arm and hand in front of her chest to cover her breasts and extends her left arm down her side and then across her lower abdomen to cover her pubic region, both of which cause her torso to arch forward. The Capitoline or Medici Aphrodite is one of a group of Aphrodites in a *pudica* pose that derive from the well-known Knidian Aphrodite, created by Praxiteles in the mid-4th century BC.<sup>16</sup> The Aphrodite found in the Theater at Beth She'an is one of at least three versions of



Figure 5. *Weary Herakles (BSS-202), front*. IAA excavations (photo by author). H: 0.95 m; W: 0.53 m.



Figure 6. *Weary Herakles (BSS-202), back*. IAA excavations (photo by author).

<sup>13</sup> See Gensheimer 2018: 78–146 and especially 85–86 for subjects of statuary in imperial baths; 90 and 101–108 for Weary and other Herakles types. Kondoleon and Segal (2011) offer an important edited volume on Aphrodite that accompanied the first museum exhibition dedicated solely to this goddess and the related deities of love.

<sup>14</sup> For the relief, see Tsafir and Foerster 1994: 105. I thank Rivka Gersht for suggesting this possibility due to the appearance of Herakles in a locally-carved work.

<sup>15</sup> For standard Graeco-Roman subjects and sculptural types discovered in Roman Palestine, see Gersht 1996a; Gersht 2017.

<sup>16</sup> On this type, see Havelock 1995.



this *pudica* type found in the city.<sup>17</sup> Another example of a mainstream Graeco-Roman sculptural type echoed at Beth She'an is a Weary Herakles (BSS-202; Figures 5-6).

The piece is readily identified as Herakles based on its nudity, heavy musculature, the lion skin (whose paws form a knot at the front of the figure's neck), and the gesture of the right arm, which is bent around the side and reaches behind, to rest the back of the hand atop the right buttock and reveal four small apples of the Hesperides held in the palm (Figure 6). The attributes (especially the apples), gesture, and posture of the figure, leaning heavily on the support, which reaches into the crux of the figure's left underarm, all identify this piece as an adaptation of the famous Weary Herakles, a type created by Lysippos in the last quarter of the 4th century BC, and best known in the colossal version discovered in the Baths of Caracalla in Rome.<sup>18</sup> These examples and others in the assemblage make clear that the patrons of the sculptural displays of Beth She'an were selecting the subjects and sculptural types from those that were circulating widely throughout the Mediterranean. Whether future work provides further information about discernable sculptural groups and other patterns of display, certainly, the Beth She'an sculptures will provide important examples of the sculptural decoration of baths, theaters, odea, and other civic contexts to compare with those of other Decapolis cities, urban centers of the Near East, and the broader eastern Roman Empire.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to these mythological statues, the sculptural assemblage provides some evidence for portraiture, and interestingly, these portraits include not only the well-known funerary examples, carved in local style and limestone (on which more below), but also imported, marble pieces that were clearly meant for civic use.<sup>20</sup> The



Figure 7. Marble bust (BSS-253), front. IAA excavations (photo by author). H: 0.25 m; W: 0.35 m; D: 0.145 m.

previously published larger than life size cuirassed statue, now on display in the Israel Museum, originally discovered built into a 4th century AD wall west of the portico at the city center, has been identified as depicting a 2nd century AD emperor, perhaps Antoninus Pius (AD 138–161) or Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–180).<sup>21</sup> In addition to this imperial portrait, the assemblage includes at least two other cuirassed busts, one of which is also larger than life size, and therefore most likely depicted an emperor.<sup>22</sup> Beyond these clear examples of imperial portraiture, there are other fragments of marble portraits that may have depicted emperors (or members of the imperial family), but could also have represented imperial officials or even local elite, for example, the under-life-size marble bust (BSS-253; Figure 7) wearing a chiton and mantle. These



Figure 8. View of multiple limestone heads. IAA excavations (photo by author).

<sup>17</sup> For another, highly comparable Capitoline/Medici Aphrodite from the Eastern Bathhouse at Beth She'an, see Foerster 2005; the third Venus *pudica* is not yet published.

<sup>18</sup> For the type, see Palagia 1988: 762–765; for the colossal example from the Baths of Caracalla, see Marvin 1983: 355–357; for a recent monograph on the sculptural display in the Baths of Caracalla that includes multiple discussions of this Herakles Farnese, see Gensheimer 2018.

<sup>19</sup> For examples of the contextual study of the Caesarea Maritima statuary, see Gersht 2008 and 2017.

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted, however, that the portraits discovered at Beth She'an are not as numerous nor do they depict the range of subjects as those discovered at Caesarea Maritima. For example, to date there are no pieces from Beth She'an identifiable as portraits of philosophers like that of Carneades from Caesarea (Gersht 1996b: 99–103), nor are there marble heads of non-imperial individuals like the two from Caesarea published in Gersht 1995: 109–113.

<sup>21</sup> Foerster and Tsafir 1987–1988: 33, Figs. 20–21; Fischer 1998: 160–161, 200, cat. nr. 188.

<sup>22</sup> For the larger-than-life size cuirassed bust, see Tsafir and Foerster 1994: 100; the other bust is unpublished.





Figure 9. Limestone head of a woman (BSS-034), front. IAA excavations (photo by author). H: 0.18 m; W: 0.17 m; D: 0.19 m.



Figure 10. Male head (BSS-004), front. IAA excavations (photo by author). H: 0.20 m; W: 0.125 m; D: 0.16 m.

marble portraits corroborate recent and continuing epigraphic work on 'sculptural conversations' and— if details of costume or remaining attributes yield further information about the status of those represented—may extend current knowledge about the sorts of portrait statues erected throughout the city center.<sup>23</sup> In addition to these marble portraits, Beth She'an is already well-known for its larger corpus of limestone funerary portraits,<sup>24</sup> and more examples of this genre were discovered in the IAA excavations. Multiple limestone heads preserve the variety of approaches to this genre (Figure 8) from those carved more geometrically to those adopting Roman imperial hairstyles, such as the life size or slightly larger head of a woman, who sports a hairstyle related to that of Julia Domna (Figure 9). This head and others that adopt contemporaneous Roman hairstyles are an important indicator of the impact of imported statuary on local sculptural (and cultural) traditions.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the sculptures provide the opportunity for a diachronic study of the 'sculptural landscape' of an entire urban center throughout its evolution. To begin with, stylistic dates demonstrate the range of time over which marble statues were imported. Despite increasing evidence for the periodic import of statuary to sites in Israel during the Hellenistic period, it seems that most pieces were



Figure 11. Head of a female with topknot (BSS-251), front. IAA excavations (photo by author). H: 0.16 m; W: 0.10 m; D: 0.07 m.

<sup>23</sup> Eck 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Skupinska-Løvset 1983; 1999.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Fischer 2009a.

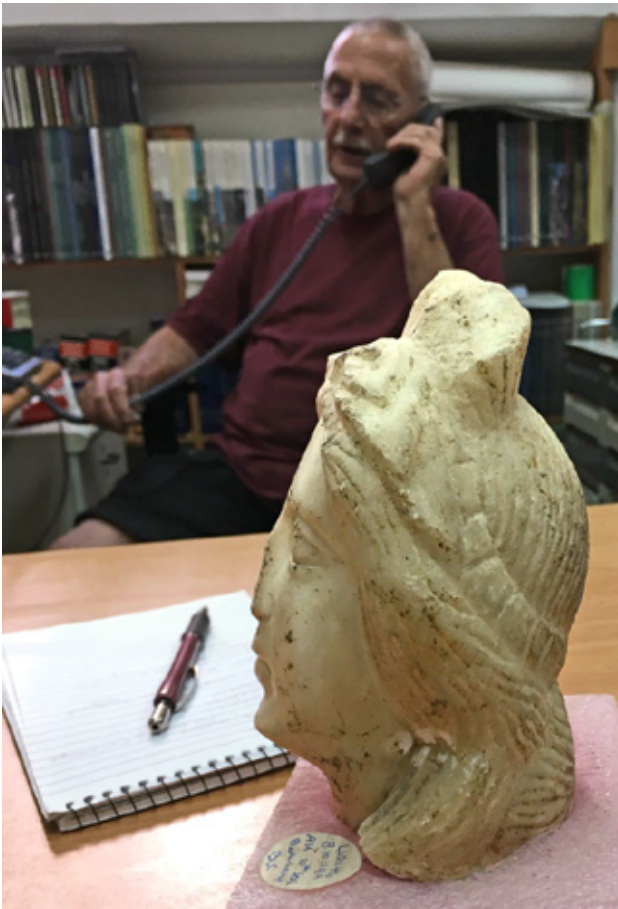


Figure 12. Head of a female with topknot (BSS–251), left profile. IAA excavations (photo by author).

imported to Beth She'an beginning in the 2nd century AD with the few pieces that may be considered Hellenistic ultimately more securely dated to the Roman era.<sup>26</sup> For example, the widely published head of Alexander the Great, discovered at Beth She'an in the 1920s excavations of the University of Pennsylvania and now on display in the Israel Museum, has been repeatedly attributed to the Hellenistic period, but is now thought to be a Roman work of the 2nd century AD.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, a male head discovered during the IAA excavations of the theater (BSS–40; Figure 10) has certain qualities that evoke Hellenistic style (the tilt of the head, the shape of the face, the carving of the eyes, and the smooth modeling of the features), though some of its technical features (tiny drill holes at each corner of the mouth and minimal carving of the interior details of the ears) seem more likely to demonstrate that the piece is a Roman period work echoing Hellenistic style and perhaps sculptural type. Thus, whether the assemblage includes a Hellenistic piece remains to be determined. However, it is clear that marble statuary was imported well into the Late Antique period (4th through the 6th centuries AD) based on pieces such as the head of a female with topknot (BSS–251; Figures 11–12) discovered in the IAA excavations of the Western Bathhouse. The figure, likely a depiction of Aphrodite or Diana due to her hairstyle, is clearly associated with the genre of Late Antique

<sup>26</sup> For Hellenistic statuary discovered in Israel, see Fischer 2009b; 2019: 19–22.



Figure 13. Torso and upper thighs of a female (BSS–200), front. IAA excavations (photo by author). H: 0.66 m; W: 0.27 m; D: 0.20 m.



Figure 14. Torso and upper thighs of a female (BSS–200), detail, recarved pubic area. IAA excavations (photo by author).

<sup>27</sup> For a list of earlier publications and a new argument for the Roman dating, see Romano 2020.





*Figure 15. Deposit of sculptures during excavation of Western Bathhouse. IAA excavations (photo by Gabi Laron).*



mythological statuettes based on her plump, oval face, fleshy chin, large eyes, puffy eyelids, ridged, arched eyebrows, stylized depiction of the hair, and extremely high polish of the face.<sup>28</sup> There are several other examples of pieces attributable to this Late Antique genre in the corpus, including a similar head of a female that was discovered in the Hebrew University excavations.

Beyond determining the range of time over which statuary was imported to Beth She'an, it may not be possible to determine the sculptural landscape's rearrangement during the life of the Roman city in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th centuries AD, due to the discovery of many of the pieces within dumps in the Western and Eastern Bathhouses. Still, there is clear evidence for the recarving and reuse (or recycling) of several pieces. For example, the torso and upper thighs of a female (BSS-200; Figures 13-14) seems likely to have been recarved, perhaps from a male, for several reasons: first, the piece's torso and shoulders are so much narrower than its hips and thighs; and second the pubic region is covered with pick marks (see Figure 14) that seem purposive due to the evenly-spaced nature of the tool marks, the distinctive look of this area of 'damage' that differs from all other damage to the surface of the piece, and the fact that these tool marks are neatly confined within the chisel lines used to delineate the pubic region from upper thighs. Finally, in terms of a diachronic study of the sculptural landscape of the city, the corpus offers an excellent opportunity to study the sculptural landscape's devolution and destruction during the city's transition to a Christian and later Byzantine center in the late 4th, 5th, 6th, and even early 7th centuries AD. The sculptural finds from Beth She'an offer critical data on the 'the end of the sculptural habit,' since the pieces were excavated from documented archaeological contexts that stretch far into the fifth and sixth centuries AD, when many of the statues had become fill in the foundations of later buildings (Figure 15) or even 'trash,' cast into dumps of the Byzantine city.<sup>29</sup> They also will provide important evidence for Christian responses to pagan statuary and the origins of Christian (and modern) iconoclasm.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, thorough and synthetic study of the Beth She'an sculptures will contribute significantly to many current topics and debates in the fields of ancient art, Roman sculptural studies, the archaeology of the Near East, Roman provincial studies, Roman history, and ancient religious studies, especially of early Christianity.

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<sup>28</sup> For the genre of Late Antique statuettes see Stirling 2005; on 'Issues of Style, Chronology, and Origins,' see Stirling 2005: 91–137.

<sup>29</sup> For changes in the urban center in the Late Antique period, see Tsafirir and Foerster 1997; for the 'end of the sculptural habit,' see Smith and Ward-Perkins 2016.

<sup>30</sup> For the Christianization of Beth She'an, see Tsafirir 2003; for the phenomenon more generally in the Mediterranean and its impact on statuary, see Kristensen 2013.

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# Swinging Handles / ‘Door Knockers’ from Nysa-Scythopolis

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*In the course of the ‘Clarence Fisher Expedition to Beth She’an (Baysān), 1921–1928’ five metal swinging handles were recovered: a pair of lion heads, a pair of crosses and a single cross, dating from Byzantine Nysa-Scythopolis. Another lion head pull came to light in a 5th–6th centuries Byzantine mansion, comprising twenty-one rooms. The objects represent door pull handles, erroneously claimed to be door knockers. They continue the Roman custom of lion-headed handles on stone doors in funerary architecture, on wooden coffins and on clay and bronze lamps. It is noteworthy that in a primarily Christian society in the early Byzantine Levant the lion head motif was still prevalent in Nysa-Scythopolis and Madaba, while at the same time cross-shaped handles are documented in Nysa-Scythopolis, Jerusalem and the Church of St. Mary in the Monastery of Saint Catherine in the Sinai Peninsula.*

KEYWORDS: SWINGING DOOR HANDLES; LION HEAD ATTACHMENTS; CROSS-SHAPED HANDLES; FUNERARY CONTEXT; MONASTERY AND CHURCH.

## Introduction

The title of this paper contains a common misnomer: the artifacts to be discussed figure in academic literature under door knockers or rappers. The definition results from the prevalence of ringed lion heads or masks as swinging handles on doors in ecclesiastical and secular buildings in the Middle Ages, during the Renaissance and in modern times (Kurz 1972: 29–35), continuing and imitating Greco-Roman and Byzantine prototypes that adorned a variety of structures and objects (Kurz 1972: 23–29). Yet, in antiquity the heads with movable rings should more adequately be defined door pull handles (Meyer 1964, *Türzieher*).

The paper focuses on the contextualization of three lion-headed and three cross-shaped door handles with rings from Byzantine Nysa-Scythopolis.<sup>1</sup> It discusses the occurrence of plain and lion-headed pull handles on stone doors in funerary architecture and on wooden coffins and the depiction of ringed lion heads on clay and bronze lamps in the Roman – early Byzantine Levant, followed by a cursory look at the evidence in the West, and continues with cursory remarks on the significance of the lion motif in the visual arts.

## The Nysa-Scythopolis Finds

In the course of the ‘Clarence Fisher Expedition to Beth She’an (Baysān), 1921–1928’ five metal swinging handles were recovered: a pair of lion heads (Figures 1–2) and a pair of crosses (Figures 4–5), now in the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, and a third cross only mentioned (Fitzgerald 1931: 42). The artifacts came to light in different locations in the debris on the slopes of the tell. Most probably always forming pairs, their original context and function is not clear. Fisher relates the two lion-head pull handles to a basilica, erected on the

summit in the early 4th century AD and pillaged and set on fire during anti-Christian riots in AD 361, with loot from the church thrown over the walls of the summit enclosure into the houses on the lower terraces (Fisher 1923: 241). Actually, the Penn excavations revealed two ecclesiastical units, the round church and possibly a monastery, and seven Byzantine houses, built on the southern summit and the lower terrace. It is assumed that the objects from the church and the monastery were scattered on the slopes in the course of the Arab conquest in AD 635/36 (Fitzgerald 1931: 41–42). Both positions reflect the tendency to find correlations between archaeological and historical data, and Fisher’s and Fitzgerald’s conclusions have not been verified and substantiated by recent research. There is no evidence for the construction of an early 4th century basilica. The round church was the only one on the summit (see the plan in Rowe 1940: pl. II), built on the ruins of the Temple of Zeus-Akraios after a long period of abandonment in the second half of the 5th or early 6th centuries AD (Foerster and Tsafirir 1997: 111; Heyden 2010: 314). Based on the study of the capitals the date of construction is narrowed down to the last quarter of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th centuries AD (Nocera 2013: 20). The round church is likely to have been the Church of St. John, the Baptist, mentioned by the pilgrim Anthony of Piacenza (Mazor 2010: 285–286; 2013: 48). With regard to the date of destruction it appears that neither the Persian-Sasanian conquest in AD 614 nor the Muslim conquest in AD 635/36 resulted in its destruction (Foerster and Tsafirir 1997: 144), that the earthquake in AD 660 caused some damage and that the total destruction (and the abandonment of the city) results from the earthquake in AD 749 (Heyden 2010: 329; Mazor 2010: 292). Still, we remain with unsolved questions. It is undisputed that the five metal artifacts were retrieved in debris accumulations on the slopes of the tell in the section of the Byzantine houses. Other

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Figure 1. Lion head handle. Expedition to Beth She'an (Beisan); Clarence Fisher, 1921–1928  
Courtesy of Penn Museum (Reg. No. 29-108-104).



Figure 2. Lion head handle. Expedition to Beth Shean (Beisan); Clarence Fisher, 1921–1928.  
Courtesy of Penn Museum (Reg. No. 29-108-105).

finds in the residential quarter, a Menas ampulla, pilgrim tokens, jewellery and a bronze *polycandelon* indicate a certain wealth of the occupants in the area, underlining the assumption that religion was mostly a 'private affair'

(Heyden 2010: 330; Pickett 2013). Consequently, for lack of unequivocal evidence we cannot conclude that the swinging handles were fitted to the wooden doors of the summit church, as has been assumed by many scholars (Mende 1981: 13; 2003: 327–331; Meyer 1964: 89; Weber 1989:60). It is equally feasible to assign them to the nearby monastic complex or to the residential structures on the lower terrace.

Finely modelled in high relief, the two nearly identical lion heads hold heavy rings in their snouts. The disc-shaped artifact (Figure 1) shows a head with an expressive face, framed by a short mane. The arrangement is schematic, with three tufts of mane above the forehead and others flanking the cheeks. Cheeks, nose and forehead are stippled. The snout is indicated by a square opening. There are nine projections set in a circle around the head at regularly spaced intervals, each terminating in a knob. The head is pierced in four places for riveting onto the wooden door, in each of the piercings a fragment of an iron nail remained. The second head (Figure 2; height 13.5cm, width 11.6cm) has pronounced whiskers, and the lion's tongue hangs from his open snout. Published in the excavation report, it has been illustrated and discussed subsequently (Fitzgerald 1931: 41, pl. 25: 4; Mende 1981: 132, fig. 427; 2003: fig. 11; Meyer 1964: 89, pl. 43: 4). A third lion head in a different style, its ring missing, came to light in a Byzantine mansion excavated by N. Tzori (Figures 3a–c; diameter 9.5cm; Kurz 1972:22, fig. 1). Situated 250m west of the Roman theatre and built in the



Figure 3a. Lion head handle from the Byzantine mansion (Collections of the Israel Antiquity Authority; Reg. No. IAA 1952.114). © Photo: The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Laura Lachman.

5th–6th centuries AD, the complex comprises twenty-one rooms and was entered from the street through a 2.63m wide door, with architecture and objects of daily life documenting a high standard of living (Zori 1953). The head has five tufts of mane above the forehead and





Figure 3b. Lion head handle from the Byzantine mansion (Collections of the Israel Antiquity Authority; Reg. No. IAA 1952.114). © Photo: The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Laura Lachman.

more tufts frame the cheeks. Eyes and eye-brows are prominent, and cheeks and nose stippled. A fourth lion-headed handle was excavated in a Byzantine monastery on the so-called Imhoff site excavated by N. Tzori and dated to the 5th and 6th centuries AD (Habas, forthcoming).<sup>2</sup> This lion head differs from the three others. Also made in high relief, the disc is framed by a circle of raised globules, an uncommon feature with parallels in Gadara/Umm Qēs and in the Byzantine house at Madaba, both probably made in the same workshop (Piccirillo 1986:336, fig. 3, pl. 68: 1; Weber 1989: 60, pl. 60: 2).

The Latin cross with a slightly longer descending arm (Figure 4; height 14cm, width 10.8cm; Mende 1981:132, fig. 428; 2003: fig. 12; Pickett 2013: 21) has arms widening out at the extremities and terminating in two knobs at each end. In the middle of the cross a loop attachment holds a ring. The cross is pierced at the top and bottom, and in each piercing a fragment of an iron nail remained. The second cross is partly broken and its ring is missing (Figure 5; Fitzgerald 1931: 42, pl. 38:21).

### Door Attachments

In the southern Levant, the earliest examples of door pull handles are documented in stone as part of rock-cut burial caves. In Jerusalem, a plain door pull handle has been recorded in Burial Cave 3 of the Akeldama Tombs in the Kidron Valley. The entrance to Chamber C was closed by a four-panelled rectangular door, adorned on the upper right-hand panel with a circular handle,



Figure 3c. Lion head handle from the Byzantine mansion (Collections of the Israel Antiquity Authority; Reg. No. IAA 1952.114). © Photo: The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Laura Lachman.

suspended from a hook (Avni and Greenhut 1996: 26, figs. I.44–I.45). With no clear evidence for a later reuse of the burial chamber, the stone door can be assigned to the original burial phase of the Second Temple period, that is before AD 70 (Avni and Greenhut 1996: 32). Through a pivoting door Chamber C gave entrance to Chamber D, occupied by the 'Ariston' family from Apamea in Syria (Avni and Greenhut 1996: 69) and used as an ossuary repository, with both chambers forming a structural unity (Avni and Greenhut 1996: 30). A close parallel for the entrance to Chamber C existed in the 2nd century AD rock-cut Tomb of *Gaius Annius*, a veteran of the 10th Legion *Fretensis*, at Gadara/Umm Qēs, documented by a drawing made in 1816 (Weber 2002: 293, 394, fig. 32; BD 55 G). Limestone and basalt stone doors, imitating panelled wooden doors and often studded with round nail heads and sometimes with carved pull handles, have been recorded in mostly Jewish burial caves and mausolea of the Roman period, in particular at Bet She'arim and Tiberias (see the discussion in Vitto 2008: 11\*–12\*). In Catacomb 4,

<sup>2</sup> I thank Gabriel Mazor for bringing the find to my attention. The IAA Reg. No. is 2020–173. The diameter is 9cm and the depth 4.7cm. The

assemblage of the metal artifacts will be published by Lihi Habas; for some photos see Tzori 1970.





Figure 4. Cross-shaped handle. Expedition to Beth Shean (Beisan); Clarence Fisher, 1921–1928. Courtesy of Penn Museum (Reg. No. 29-108-106).

Halls A and C at Bet She'arim the stone doors comprised two wings, each subdivided into three panels. An iron loop is affixed in the centre of a carved circle on the right middle panel, with the original ring for pushing and pulling the door now missing (Mazar 1973: 171, 182, pls. 31:1, 36:1). A different version is represented by several doors with carved club-shaped handles and iron

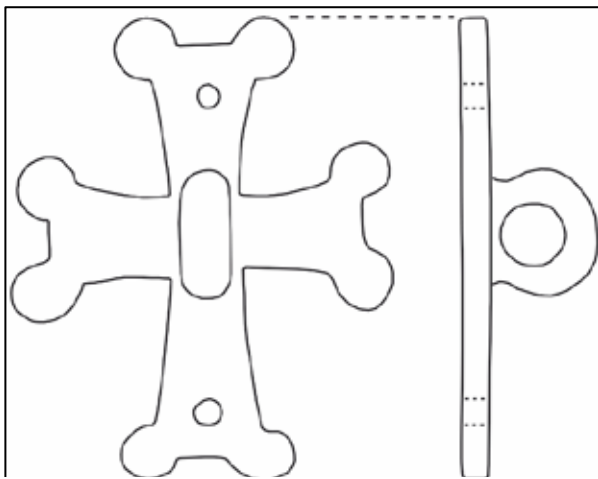


Figure 5. Cross-shaped handle. Expedition to Beth Shean (Beisan); Clarence Fisher, 1921–1928. Courtesy of Penn Museum (Reg. No. 29-108-107).

loops at the top for securing a ring (Avigad 1976: 48; 91; figs. 5; 20; 37:1; pls. 4:1, 8–9, 18:1, 25:1, 27:2). Several burial chambers with nail-studded stone doors have been recorded at Gadara/Umm Qēs (Weber 2002: pls. 31: C,

91: B), with the two double-winged basalt doors in the 1st century AD rock-cut Tomb of *Germani* (Weber 2002: 378, BD 37, fig. 100; pl. 31: A) and in the 1st to 2nd centuries AD western hypogeum (Weber 2002:363, BD 29, fig. 68) well-preserved.

Less common are panelled and nail studded stone doors with ringed lion-headed pull handles. A double-winged basalt door found in the Gadara necropolis is dated to the 1st to 3rd centuries AD (Weber 2002: 393–394, BD 55 B, pl. 91: A). At Nebi Turfini in the vicinity of Nebi Samuel a pivoting lime-stone door was discovered, opening into a burial chamber (Figure 6). With a height of about 78cm and a width of 36cm it has four panels,



Figure 6. Limestone door from a burial cave at Nebi Tufini. After Conder and Kitchener 1883: 153.

the upper two adorned with ringed lion heads, the lower with bull heads, and originally had a metal lock with a lead ring beneath it (Conder and Kitchener 1883: 153–154; Figueras 2013: fig. 619). Additional lion head handles occur on several basalt doors in the Hauran, once part of funerary structures (Weber 1989: pl. 61:1–2). Of particular interest is the marble door in the Tomb of *Yarhai* at Palmyra, built in the early 2nd century AD (Künzl and Künzl 2003: 285, fig. 81; Mende 1981: 133,

fig. 420; Weber 1989: 59). Measuring 2.5 x 1.3m the two-winged panelled door is fitted with three pull handles: a single plain ring held in a loop at grip height and two ringed lion-headed handles in the centre of the upper half, possibly differentiating between functional and symbolic intention.

In the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, there are two ringed lion heads, said to be from Syria (Comstock and Vermeule 1971: Nos. 673–674; Weber 1989: pl. 59). Defined as coffin attachments their style differs from the standard Syrian and Transjordan groups. They do not form a circular disc, as the mane is arranged in projecting tufts framing the face that are interrupted at the top by semi-circular ears. The puckered brows in the middle of the forehead are uncommon. The heads display a distinct plasticity that recalls the two finds from the tell at Nysa-Scythopolis, and although there is no stylistic congruence, the diameter of 12.5cm is only slightly larger. Hence, I tentatively suggest that the artifacts represent swinging door handles that most likely date from the Byzantine period.

Secure evidence for swinging handles in the shape of ringed lion heads is documented at Madaba. Two handles, made from the same mould, came to light in a private house which was set on fire and abandoned in the Byzantine period, probably at the end of the 6th century AD (Piccirillo 1986: 336, fig. 3, pl. 68: 1). They were found at the spot where the double-winged wooden door fell inward while burning and causing visible damage to the mosaic floor (Piccirillo 1986: 333). They differ from the coffin attachments as the disc is framed by a circle of raised dots (similar to the lion head handle from the monastic complex at Nysa-Scythopolis), and they were probably produced in the same workshop as the ringed lion head from Gadara/Umm Qēs in the Amman Archaeological Museum (unpublished; see Weber 1989: 60, note 243, pl. 60:2).

In addition to representing a rare *in situ* find, the evidence for the wooden door is significant. Altogether, the preservation of wooden doors is rare. A 5th century AD door in the Church of Saint Barbara in Old Cairo is without pull handles (Mende 2003: 328, fig. 13), while the early 5th century AD door in S. Ambrogio, Milano is decorated with rich ornamentation of figured scenes and two ringed lion head pull handles (Mende 2003: 322, fig. 8). In the 6th century AD Church of St. Mary in the Monastery of Saint Catherine three wooden doors with pull handles are preserved to this day. The church was built under Justinian in the years AD 548–565. The wooden door from the narthex into the nave is made of four vertical leaves and adorned with two identical cross-shaped pull handles on the two inner leaves, fastened by four rivets. The rings can be reached at a height of 1.5m and the total height of the door is 3.63m (Forsyth and Weitzmann 1965: pls. 46, 47). The shape of the cross is similar to the Nysa-Scythopolis cross, fastened by two rivets. The apse is flanked by the Chapel

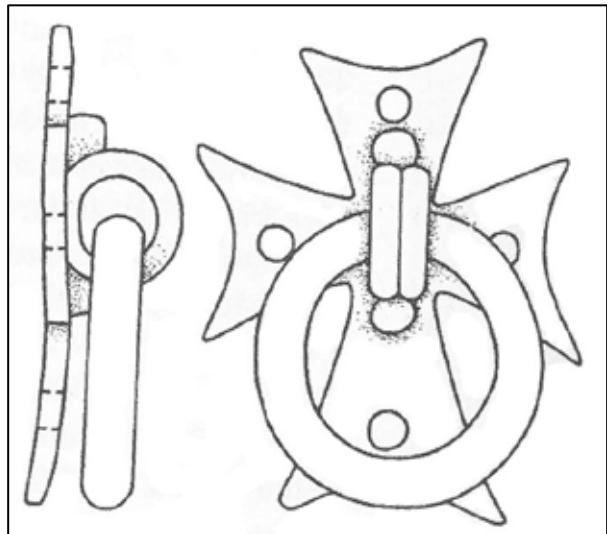


Figure 7a. Cross-shaped handle from Jerusalem, The Monastery of the Virgins. Reproduced with the permission of the Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.



Figure 7b. Cross-shaped handle from Jerusalem, The Monastery of the Virgins. Reproduced with the permission of the Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

of St. James the Less on the north and the Chapel of Forty Martyrs on the south. The double-winged wooden doors from the aisles are fitted with cross-shaped pull handles on the right wing and simple rings on the left wing (Forsyth and Weitzmann 1965: pl. 94). The handle on the door to the Chapel of the Forty Martyrs tallies with that on the door to the nave (Forsyth and



Figure 8. Coffin attachment in Jerusalem, Rockefeller Museum. Provenance unknown. Photo Clara Amit. Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

Weitzmann 1965: pl. 95: G), while the handle on the door to the Chapel of St. James the Less is more elaborate, with four additional small crosses set between the arms of the large cross (Forsyth and Weitzmann 1965: pl. 95: E).

In Jerusalem, the excavation of the Monastery of the Virgins yielded further evidence. Adjacent to the south-western corner of the Temple Mount enclosure, the structure is identified with the 'Enclosed Convent' mentioned by the pilgrim Theodosius in the early 6th century AD (Mazar 2003: 65–67). In the debris of two rooms on the ground floor two cross-shaped pull handles were recovered, an intact and a fragmentary one (Figures 7a-b; Mazar 2003: 27, pls. I.2: 3, 34, I.4: 1). The cross, fastened by four rivets, is similar to the Nysa-Scythopolis find. Following the author's suggestion that the chapel was located on the second floor the two handles are tentatively assigned to the chapel's wooden door. Constructed in the 4th century the building was destroyed in the Persian conquest of AD 614 and subsequently no longer used (Mazar 2003: 67).

### Coffin Attachments

Disc-shaped lion heads/masks with rings in the animal's snout represent attachments for wooden coffins (Figures 8–9), and although it has been suggested that the movable rings served for transportation, the accepted function to date is that garlands were suspended from the rings. With the lion representing the traditional protector



Figure 9. Coffin attachment, said to be from Qasr-ibn-Ouwardāne, North Syria. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, Photo Reinhard Friedrich, Inv. No. 26/65.

of the dead, garlands as a symbol of immortality were hung from the rings in the course of the burial ceremonies, as shown on stone sarcophagi (see Figure 10; Weber 1989: 55–56, 67).

The bulk of finds originates from find-spots in the modern states of Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan (Weber 1989: 5, see the map on p. 4). The interment in wooden coffins decorated with lion-head attachments was practised in Roman times. In the Abu Sabun necropolis near Homs/Emesa, a bronze coin minted in Tyre (AD 14–15) provides a *terminus post quem* for the burial in a wooden coffin with four bronze attachments, covered with silver foil (Seyrig 1953: 14–15; Weber 1989: 50, pl. 6). Their main period of production falls in the 2nd century AD and only some can be dated to the 3rd century AD (Weber 1989: 66). Classified by morphological, stylistic and iconographic criteria the artifacts can be attributed to five regional centres of production, although no workshops have been uncovered to date. Four groups are assigned to workshops in Syria. The fifth group, the Transjordan Group (Weber 1989: 45–48), is represented by seven examples, three from burials in multi-chambered loculi tombs at Gerasa and surroundings (see Leonhard 1987: pls. 60:2, 61; Weber 1989: pl. 56:3–6 for four attachments from a tomb at Khirbet Qurei (Jaba), five kilometres northeast of ancient Gerasa). It is this group and the ten finds from Nablus (Weber 1989: pl. 31:1), Jaffa (Weber 1989: pl. 30:1–2) and of unknown



provenance in the Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem (for the list see Weber 1989: 85) that should be analysed in search for the prototypes of the Byzantine door pull handles. Of the ten lion-head attachments six are assigned to the South Syrian Group, made in the repoussé technique (Khalil 1989:72–73), and three are cast, using the ancient lost wax method (Figure 8; Khalil 1989: 73; Weber 1989: pl. 23:3) and attributed to the North Syrian Group. In addition, there is a cast lion-head disc in the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia that was purchased in Tel Aviv in the 1960ties (Biers and James 2004: 218–219, Cat. No. 189). It is suggested that the item is of a later date than the Roman period coffin attachments and that it might have served as a door ornament, possibly in a Christian Basilica. However, in view of the rim mouldings that have parallels in the mentioned finds from Nablus and Jaffa and two lion-head attachments in the Museum of Archaeology, Tartus (Weber 1989: pl. 9) and the marked stylistic divergence from the Byzantine door pull handles, the proposed late date should be rejected and the item assigned to the North Syrian Group. With their diameter ranging from 15 to 36cm (Weber 1989: 27), the diameter of 15.7cm is in accord. In fact, cast coffin attachments are characteristic for the region north of the line Beirut – Damascus – Palmyra (Weber 1989: 26–27). Surprisingly, none of the attachments discussed tallies with the Transjordan Group, and the probable Syrian origin of the items raises questions that must remain unsolved without contextual evidence.

Let us look at two cast coffin attachments, representing different styles in the North Syrian Group. The unprovenanced ringed lion head in the Rockefeller Museum has a diameter of 11–11.5cm., indicating that the size is by no means a secure criterion to define the function (Figure 8; Weber 1989: pl. 23:3). In size and style, the disc has two parallels in the Hama Archaeological Museum (Weber 1989: pl. 23:1–2). The face of the lion is framed by a schematic mane of crescent-shaped strands of hair, omitting the ears at the height of the temples. The style of the three artifacts conveys a meek animal, in contrast to the coffin attachment said to be from Qasr-ibn Ouardâne, northeast of Hama, that portrays a ferocious animal (Figure 9; Weber 1989: pl. 8:3). With a diameter of about 30cm the face is executed in high relief with a wide anthropoid nose, pronounced cheeks, a deep wrinkle on the forehead and a short mane, arranged in tufts. With the find-spot not necessarily correct, the artifact is dated to the 3rd century AD (Weber 1989: 6, 66). Hence, the time-span for the use of ringed lion-head attachments on wooden coffins is documented for the first three centuries of the common era, and in addition to the stylistic differences with the cast door handles from Nysa-Scythopolis, to date there is no evidence for a chronological sequence from coffin attachments to door pull handles.

Concurrent with the wooden coffins used in the Levant, stone sarcophagi and lead coffins were decorated with

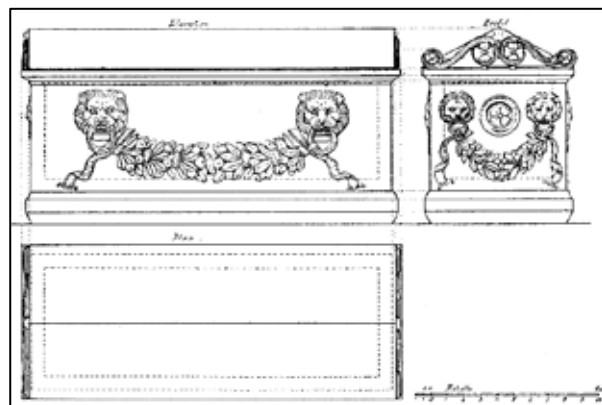


Figure 10. Limestone sarcophagus from Sidon, now in the National Museum, Beirut. After Contenau 1920: 36, Fig. 10.

lion heads. On a sarcophagus from Sidon, decorated with pairs of ringed lion heads on the two long sides and on one narrow side, garlands of leaves were suspended from the rings (Figure 10; Contenau 1920: fig. 10; Koch 1977: figs. 8–9; Weber 1989: pl. 62); the other narrow side depicts a ship (Casson 1971: fig. 156). There are also examples with three lion heads or two lion heads at the corners and a gorgoneion at the centre, with suspended garlands (Koch 1977: figs. 5–6). Pairs of ringed lion heads, set in the corners of the long side, adorn basalt sarcophagi at Bostra (Weber 1989: pl. 61: 3–4) and Abila/Qwēlbe and surroundings (Weber 2002: 234, pl. 117: A, the side with the lion heads not illustrated; pl. 117: E, F). Lead coffins from Sidon, documented only there, display pairs of lion heads in the corners, connected by a band of ivy leaves (Chéhab 1934: 343, Nos. 7–10; pls. 42–43; Koch and Sichtermann 1982: fig. 580).

### Lamps

Lamps adorned with a ringed lion head on the nozzle are singular. Besides the two lamps presented here (Figures 11–12), two more are recorded, with the upper lamps representing three different moulds (Kaufmann 2012: No. 900; Sussman 2012: 104, fig. 72B: 4). Visual fabric inspection and the motif provide unequivocal evidence for their manufacture in workshops in the Gerasa area, yet the lamps are singular even in the local production line. With the peak of production in the mid-2nd century AD they belong to the standard Jerash-style lamps (Kehrberg 2011: 131), and the imagery connects them to the coffin attachments of the Transjordan Group.

A different version of the lion motif is documented in the manufacture of grey ware lamps at Gerasa. In 1933 a workshop depot of local ceramics was discovered in the course of construction work along the road leading southward out of the site, with the workshop production dated to the first half of the 2nd century AD (Fisher 1934: 12–13; Iliffe 1945). Originally a rock-cut burial chamber, an oil-press was installed later. The ceramic assemblage included lamps, figurines, masks, plaster

moulds and wasters, among them lamps with splayed, fluked nozzles and upcurved handles, ending in a calyx with a lion's head emerging from it (Iliffe 1945: 19, No. 119; Rosenthal and Sivan 1978: No. 372). A bronze version came to light at Dura Europos (Baur 1947:74, No. 422, pl. 14). A bronze lamp in the British Museum, dated about AD 50–150, displays the upcurved handle, ending in a lion head with a split ring in its mouth (Bailey 1996:40–41, Q 3671). The Gerasa lamp production underlines the significance of the lion motif in the visual arts of the Decapolis.



Figure 11. Oil lamp, manufactured in a workshop at Gerasa or vicinity. © David and Jemimah Jeselsohn Collection, Zurich (Reg. Nos. 4965). Photos Ardon Bar-Hama.

### A Look to the West

In the West lion-head attachments with and without rings are well-documented on doors and various other artifacts like metal vessels, oar and beam attachments and sarcophagi, documenting a prevalent custom (see Künzl 2003: figs. 7–8, 10, 13–14, 16; Künzl and Künzl 2003: figs. 73–78). For comparison three examples are referred to: the wall paintings in Pompeian late Second Style dating from after the 1st century BC, the portal from the Roman town of Lopodunum (today Ladenburg) in southern Germany and the small ivory casket in the British Museum. The ornate portal, depicted on the side

wall painting in bedroom M in the Villa of *P. Fannius Synistor* at Boscoreale (Künzl and Künzl 2003: 259, figs. 24–25) is double-doored with each of the lower panels adorned with a lion head pull handle. Four lion head handles are depicted on a double door with four panels in the triclinium of the villa at Torre Annunziata (Künzl and Künzl 2003: 262, fig. 30). The double-doored Ladenburg portal with a height of 3.5m and a width of 3.6m represents possibly the entrance to a temple erected between AD 125–150; it had four bronze ringed lion-headed pull handles (Künzl and Künzl 2003: colour pls. 2–3 and Beilage 1).



Figure 12. Oil lamp, manufactured in a workshop at Gerasa or vicinity. © David and Jemimah Jeselsohn Collection, Zurich (Reg. Nos. 1017). Photos Ardon Bar-Hama.

The ivory casket is a liturgical object dating to about AD 420–430 and probably made in Rome. It documents the merger of Greco-Roman imagery with Christian iconography. Decorated with four panels carved in relief, one of them depicts the Maries at the Sepulchre, a quadrangular building with columns at the corners and surmounted by a cupola with domed roof. It is the tomb chamber with an open double-winged door, showing part of a sarcophagus. The right wing has three panels, with a ringed lion head on the central one; on the upper panel is carved the scene of the Raising of Lazarus, on the lower, a seated female figure, identified with Mary (Künzl and Künzl 2003: 251–253; Kurz 1972: fig. 2; Mende 1981: fig. 425; 2003: fig. 6). Compared to the

human figures on the upper and lower panel, the lion's head is massive. The door opens to the outside, and it appears that the perspective was chosen by the artist to be able to glance at the sarcophagus inside the tomb chamber. In Roman imperial times a fair number of doors related to funerary contexts, the so-called Hades doors, depict the lion head as a pull handle for opening the doors to the outside, while the evidence from buildings points to doors opening to the inside (Künzl and Künzl 2003: 272–280, figs. 57–60).

### The Iconography

Representations of lions in various artistic media and their symbolic function in secular, sacred and cultic contexts have a long-standing tradition in the Orient among different ethnic and religious entities. In general, the manifold lion image was popular and associated with protective and destructive forces.<sup>3</sup> The invention of swinging handles with ringed lion heads occurred in ancient Greece (Künzl 2003: 308; Kurz 1972:23, 41; Weber 1989: 57–58). In the Roman period, their function as door pulls handles in buildings fulfilled the task of a doorman repudiating evil forces and protecting people entering, and the stone doors in sepulchres stand for the guarded entrance of the deceased into the netherworld. In the Byzantine period this apotropaic significance was adopted by Christians (Mende 1981: 134–136; 2003: 372–373; Weber 1989: 60).

In Syria, two inscriptions, one from the Temple of Zeus in es-Sanameine (AD 84/85) and the other from the same site, mention small lion reliefs adorning doors, named 'λεοντάρια', and although there is no evidence that the term refers to doors adorned with ringed lion heads, it is tempting to tentatively consider a connection (Weber 1989: 53–54).

### Conclusion

It can be concluded that the Byzantine ringed lion heads from Nysa-Scythopolis represent door pull handles in continuation of the tradition of the Roman period coffin attachments, albeit with a chronological gap. Workshops must have existed in the Decapolis. However, with the single contextualized parallel from the residence at Madaba it can only be surmised that the Nysa-Scythopolis lion heads belonged to the door of the summit church; alternatively, a monastery or the residence of a wealthy city dweller is also possible. The use of the cross-shaped handles could point to an ecclesiastical building, as documented in the Monastery of the Virgins in Jerusalem and the Church of Saint Mary in Sinai. In Late Antique art the motif of the ringed lion head was part of the visual culture and became genuinely global, attested far beyond the Mediterranean world during Medieval and modern times in Europe (Kurz

1972: 29–35; Mende 2003) and as far as China (Kurz 1972: 35–41).

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<sup>3</sup> For a summary on the significance of the lion in the Hellenistic and Roman periods in the Levant see Palistrant Shaick 2017.



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# The Church of the Martyr and Other Churches at Scythopolis (Beth She'an):

## A Study of Literary and Epigraphic Sources

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*This paper analyses literary and some archaeological evidence for the identification of five churches mentioned in the sources in late antique Scythopolis. As part of this issue, four Greek inscriptions discovered in the so-called Church of Andreas and Church of the Martyr are published for the first time. The inscriptions demonstrate that:*

1. *The Church of Andreas was built over an earlier religious building dated to the 4th century AD.*
2. *The excavated church dates from the first half of the 5th century AD and was built before the city wall came to existence.*
3. *This shrine can be identified with the Church of the Martyr Basilus as well as with 'The Ancient Church', probably the first cathedral of Scythopolis.*
4. *The so-called Church of the Martyr was dedicated to the same saint. It was erected when the city wall was in place. The two shrines functioned simultaneously for many years.*

KEYWORDS: SCYTHOPOLIS, BETH SHE'AN, GREEK INSCRIPTIONS, ANCIENT CHURCHES, CATHEDRAL CHURCH.

### The churches of Scythopolis in the literary sources

The literary sources have preserved the memory of several churches and monasteries at Scythopolis and in its vicinity, and archaeological research has brought to light the remains of at least three churches and several monastic foundations in the city and in its vicinity. We shall not discuss the monasteries in the framework of this paper, except inasmuch as their documentation in the sources is relevant to the discussion of the churches. The principal source on the topography of Scythopolis is Cyril, a native of the city who became a monk of Mar Saba monastery and wrote *Lives of the most famous monks of the Judaean Desert* in the mid-sixth century AD. Other sources — Latin pilgrims, hagiographers, and historians, mainly of the 6th century AD — will be presented by-and-by.

Four or possibly five churches are mentioned in the sources: one dedicated to the apostle Thomas, one to Saint John (the Baptist? the Evangelist?), a third to the martyr Procopius and a fourth to the martyr Basilus. Another, 'The Ancient Church', is most likely identical to St. Basilus, as we shall see. About St. Thomas' Church we learn from Cyril of Scythopolis that it was situated outside the city, on the road leading to Caesarea, and it had a monastery nearby or attached to it, for Sabas went there to

visit an *hesychastes* named Procopius.<sup>1</sup> This term in Cyril's language indicates a recluse rather than a hermit — in fact, Procopius received guests, not only the saintly monk Sabas but also Cyril's father, a lawyer at the service of the metropolitan, and the child Cyril himself. A recluse needed a community, even if a small one, to provide for his needs, and there is no lack of monasteries clustered around the road out of the Caesarea gate, the north-western gate of the city. A possible candidate are the remains at Tel Naharon,<sup>2</sup> but it is worth noting that beside the monastery of Tell Basul remains of a church were observed at a spot called Tell Tumas, which apparently preserves the name of saint Thomas.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps these are the remain of St. Thomas' Church, or possibly Tel Basul itself bore the name of the Apostoleion.<sup>4</sup>

**The church of Saint John** is mentioned by Cyril of Scythopolis *en passant*, while he relates a visit of the venerated monk Sabas to a monastery called Enthemanih to see an old monk named John, who had lived eighty years there, and had been a recluse for the last fifty years. In the garden of this monastery Sabas miraculously healed a girl possessed by a demon.<sup>5</sup> But before examining what can be learned from this report about the possible location of this church, it is necessary to discuss another source that mentions saint John, and by extension his church. The

<sup>1</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 61, 75; Schwartz 1939: 162–163, 180.

<sup>2</sup> Map ref. 19671/21273; Tzori 1962: 186, no. 138.

<sup>3</sup> Map reference 19515/21251; Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 139, no. 239.

For Tel Basul, see Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 137–138, no. 235; Tzori 1974: 227.

<sup>4</sup> In any case, the so-called Imhoff monastery, excavated by Tzori in 1959 (Ovadia 1970: 40, no. 25; 1987: 32, no. 28; Tzori 1959; 1960), is excluded because it is located within the city wall.

<sup>5</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 62–63; Schwartz 1939: 163–164. The event occurred during Sabas' first visit to Beth She'an in autumn 518.



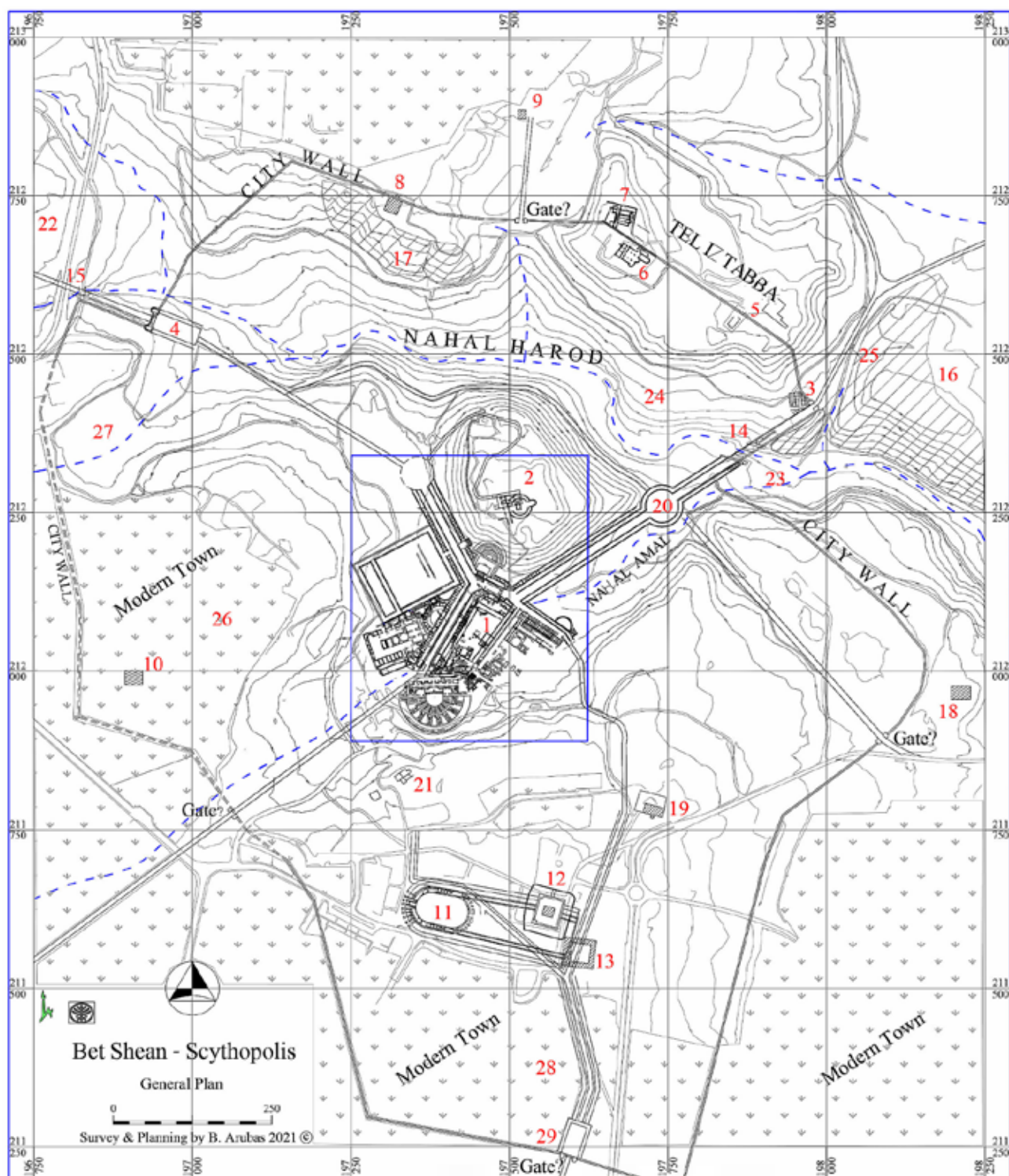


Figure 1. Map of Beth Shean: 1. City Center; 2. Tel Bet Shean (The Acropolis); 3. Northeastern Gate (Damascus Gate); 4. Northwestern Gate (Caesarea Gate); 5. Hellenistic quarter; 6. Church of the Martyr (St. Basilus); 7. Church of Andreas (St. Basilus); 8. Monastery of Kyra Maria; 9. Samaritan synagogue; 10. House of Leontios (Synagogue); 11. Amphitheater/Hipostadium; 12. Crusader Fortress; 13. Turkish Serai; 14. Truncated Bridge (Jisr el-Maktu'a); 15. Northwestern Bridge (Jisr el-Khan); 16. Tell el-Hammam (Cemetery); 17. Northern Cemetery; 18. Extramural Monastery?; 19. Ottoman Mosque; 20. Circular Piazza; 21. Bathhouse; 23. 'Ain et-Tineh; 24. Monastery of Abba Justinus; 25. Funerary Chapel; 26. Mansion Hose; 27. 'Imhoff' monastery; 28. Leppers' Bath; 29. Southern Gate (pylé dekumpon)(B. Arubas).

anonymous Piacenza Pilgrim, who toured the Holy Land c. AD 570, so described his visit to Scythopolis: *Et dum descendimus per Galilaeam iuxta Iordanem, transeuntes multas civitates, quae leguntur, venimus in civitate*

*metropoli Galilaeae, quae vocatur Scitopolis (sic!), in monte posita, ubi sanctus Iohannes multas virtutes operatur*; 'And descending through Galilee next to the Jordan, passing through many cities of which is spoken

(above), we came to the capital city of the Galilee, which is called Scythopolis, set on a mountain, where saint John accomplishes many miracles'.<sup>6</sup> Based on these words Avi-Yonah identified St. John's Church with the Round Church on the tell (see Arubas this volume Figures 1; 2: 34).<sup>7</sup> But can the pilgrim's words be taken literally? Firstly, his description of the city 'set on a mountain': even if impressed by the mound, he could not have failed to notice the majestic expanse of Scythopolis at the foot of the tell. Either he used the phrase figuratively, citing the Gospel to express his wonderment,<sup>8</sup> or he confused Scythopolis with another city, probably Gadara, which he visited immediately before coming to Scythopolis.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, in the language of the Piacenza Pilgrim *ubi* ('where') most likely refers to *Scitopolis* rather than to *in monte* ('on a mountain'); it would therefore be a mistake, or at least unwise, to infer from his words that St. John's Church was located on the tell. And a third difficulty: why does the pilgrim refer to saint John as the miracle-worker of Scythopolis, when the boast of the city was the martyr Basilus, of whom we shall presently speak? One possible explanation is that the Piacenza Pilgrim simply confuses two saints and replaces Basilus, a local martyr unknown elsewhere, with John the Baptist, who had a famous shrine, a centre of miraculous healings, at Sebaste, the next city the pilgrim visited after Scythopolis.<sup>10</sup> Another possible solution is that *sanctus Iohannes* was not saint John the Baptist but the monk John, the old recluse of Enthemanith, whose tomb had become a focus of miracles. Or a third, combined explanation, that the Piacenza pilgrim was misled to locate the miracles of saint John (the Baptist) in Scythopolis because he had been shown the tomb of a thaumaturge John (the former recluse) in this city.

But if St. John was not on the tell, where was it? Attempts were made to locate it through its proximity to the monastery of Enthemanith, for in his report of Sabas' visit to John, the recluse at Enthemanith, Cyril of Scythopolis writes that this monastery was located in the

neighbourhood of St. John's Church (ἐν τοῖς περὶ τὸν ἅγιον Ἰωάννην τόποις),<sup>11</sup> and that Sabas went through the city centre to reach it. On the way he passed κατὰ τὴν λεγομένην ἀψίδα τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννου, 'near the arch called of saint John'<sup>12</sup>—undoubtedly because it led to the area called after St. John's Church—and saw a woman suffering from bleeding, lying in the western portico of the street. It was suggested that the name Enthemanith was a corruption of a Hebrew-Aramaic toponym *'En Te'enh*, 'the spring of the Fig-tree', and the latter was identified with a place called *'Ain et-Tineh* (Figure 1: 23), southeast of the eastern bridge, *Jisr el-Maktu'a* ('The Truncated Bridge'; Figure 1: 14). Based on this argument, the monastery of Enthemanith was accordingly located outside the eastern gate in the city wall.<sup>13</sup> Mazor furtherly suggested that Enthemanith occupied precisely the spot where an isolated mosaic pavement bearing a Greek inscription commemorates the foundation of 'the monastery of Abba Justinus' in July AD 522.<sup>14</sup> The two monasteries would be one and the same. However, the identification of Enthemanith with the monastery of Abba Justinus is unacceptable for several reasons. First, Sabas visited Enthemanith in AD 518, when, according to Cyril's testimony, the monastery had been long in existence, if the old recluse had lived there for 80 years. Secondly, the Greek text shows clearly that Abba Justinus' foundation was not a monastery, but a hermitage built for the recluse by a local benefactor. Thirdly, Fitzgerald located the mosaic pavement east of the northern cemetery, on the northern bank of Nahal Harod, above the Truncated Bridge (Figure 1: 24), while *'Ain et-Tineh* is located southeast of the bridge (Figure 1: 23).<sup>15</sup>

Returning to of Enthemanith, its location at *'Ain et-Tineh* would require locating St. John's Church in the same area, contrary to its suggested identification with the Round Church, for the two sites are not only distant from one another as the crow flies and even more by their respective access routes, but also separated by the topography of Beth

<sup>6</sup> The name of the pilgrim is unknown, but he is commonly surnamed Antoninus after his patron saint: *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 8, Geyer (ed.) 1965: 133.

<sup>7</sup> Avi-Yonah 1962: 60. Avi-Yonah is followed by Arav 1989: 196–197 and Mazor 2008: 1634; 2010: 286.

<sup>8</sup> From Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 14): *Vos estis lux mundi. Non potest civitas abscondi supra montem posita*, 'You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hid'.

<sup>9</sup> *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 7, Geyer (ed.) 1965: 132. The Pilgrim even viewed Gadara 'set on a mountain' from below, while staying at Hammath Gader. Confusing cities and places frequently occur in the *Itinerarium*; see note 10.

<sup>10</sup> Describing Sebaste, the Piacenza Pilgrim *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 8, Geyer (ed.) 1965: 133, only mentions the tomb of the prophet Elisha, although this tomb was in the same church where the relics of John the Baptist worked miracles. In another chapter *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 6, Geyer (ed.) 1965: 131 he speaks of the church of St. John 'in a city once called Samaria and now Neapolis' and confuses St. John's with the church of the Well of the Samaritan woman. This kind of mix-ups is typical of the Piacenza Pilgrim. For the famous shrine of St. John, the Baptist at Sebaste, see Jerome, *Ep.* 108 and many other sources in Baldi 1982: 231–243. Interestingly in the *recensio altera*, a slightly shorter version of the *Itinerarium*, the *sanctus* is unnamed *Antonini Placentini Itinerarii recensio altera* 8, Geyer (ed.) 1965: 159.

<sup>11</sup> *Vita Sabae* 62, Schwartz (ed.) 1939: 163. Sabas' meeting with the recluse took place during Sabas' first visit to Scythopolis in AD 518,

when he resided in the bishop's palace, the *episkopeion*: cf. *Vita Sabae* 61.

<sup>12</sup> There is no need to remind the readers that ἀψίς, in the Greek of Late Antiquity, did not mean 'apse' but 'arch' or 'gate'.

<sup>13</sup> *'Ain et-Tineh* is marked in the British Survey's plan of Beisan: *SWP* II, in front of p. 104. For the location of Enthemanith in this place, see Arav 1989: 195–196; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1994: 136, and see Mazor, next note.

<sup>14</sup> Mazor 2010: 286–287; 2013, and for the inscription, Fitzgerald 1939: 19, Pl. XXII; *SEG* VIII, no. 37. The inscription reads: 'This *monasterion* of Abba Justinus the recluse was built in the time of the 15th indiction, on the 2[0 to 29] of Panemos of the year 585, and he was enclosed in the same year, on the [day missing] of September of the 1st indication. An offering of Anoiosios the advocate. Lord, help!' For a discussion, see Di Segni 1997: 390–393. In the early Byzantine period the term μοναστήριον, *monasterium*, most often indicates a monastic cell rather than a communal monastery.

<sup>15</sup> Fitzgerald 1932: 148; 1939: 19. Indeed, in the latter publication the description of the site is somehow confused: the mosaic floor is located east of the (northern) cemetery, but 'it lies on the south side of the Jalud (*Nahal Harod*) above an old broken bridge'. But the site can hardly be on the south bank of the stream and at the same time above the bridge, nor could such a location be described as 'east of the cemetery'. Either this is a *lapsus calami* (north side rather than south) or Fitzgerald meant 'in the south bend of the Jalud', that is, where *Nahal Harod* turns southward around the eastern side of the mound.

She'an. The only recommendation for this double identification is the lack of another candidate for St. John in a similar radius from 'Ain et-Tineh, except for the church we identify as St. Basilus (see below) and the funerary chapel at el-Ḥammam (Figure 1: 25).<sup>16</sup>

But was the monastery of Enthemanih really there? Cyril says nothing about Sabas going out of the city: on the contrary the hagiographer, always punctilious in his choice of words, uses the verb ἀπέρχεσθαι, 'to go from one place to another' for Sabas' walk to Enthemanih, while in describing persons going to St. Thomas' Church, which was outside the city gate (see above), he uses thrice the verb ἐξέρχεσθαι and once ἐξίέναι, both meaning 'to go out'.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, there is no real phonetic probability for equating Enthemanih with a supposed 'En Te'enah, and hence for its identification with 'Ain et-Tineh.<sup>18</sup> This location of Enthemanih should therefore be abandoned. Thus, what we can learn from Cyril's narration is only that St. John and Enthemanih were neighbours, both were located near an arch or gate called after the church and along or immediately past a main street in the city centre that had a western portico — that is, not a street running in an east-west direction or one having buildings or shops flush against the pavement on its western side. Sabas presumably started for Enthemanih from his lodging in the *episkopeion*.<sup>19</sup> Anticipating this writer's opinion that the episcopal compound was located on the tell,<sup>20</sup> we can begin following his tracks down the winding road that descended from the top of the tell and joined the North-western Street (see Arubas this volume Figure 2: 11) midway between the Caesarea Gate and the city centre — the only way to descend the mound, for the monumental staircase and the propylaeum (see Arubas this volume Figures 2: 12; 6) of the Roman acropolis were no longer accessible in the 6th century AD (Arubas, this volume). This street did have a western portico as well as a gate, the one leading into the former Roman *temenos*, now occupied by Byzantine buildings (see Arubas this volume Figures 2: 10; 4-5). Another arch crossed the Street of the Monuments (see Arubas this volume Figure 2: 30), near the Nymphaeum, where a 'western portico' did not exist at any time. Palladius Street (see Arubas this volume Figure 2: 6) did have a western portico, but the whole area has

been excavated and no likely spot for a church and/or a monastery can be pointed out. Only a discussion of the archaeological features of the city centre can suggest a solution to the puzzle (see Arubas, this volume).

**The church of the martyr Procopius** is mentioned by a single source, again Cyril of Scythopolis, but his few words yield much information. On his second visit to Scythopolis, in autumn AD 531, Sabas was again a guest in the bishop's palace, but this time Cyril specifies that he stayed ἐν τῷ ἐκεῖσε οἴκῳ τοῦ ἁγίου μάρτυρος Προκοπίου, 'in the house of the holy martyr Procopius therein'; from which we understand that there was a church dedicated to St. Procopius attached to the *episkopeion* and provided with a hostelry or a monastery.<sup>21</sup> The latter is more likely, for important churches — and a church attached to the episcopal palace must be counted as one — had their own team of *spoudaei*, monks in charge of the daily liturgy. Both the church and the monastery were part of the compound where the metropolitan of Scythopolis and head of the churches of Second Palestine lived and worked. In the 6th century AD a bishop's work included much administrative and judicial activity not only as a religious leader but also as a city magistrate, so the compound would have extended to offices, a law court and possibly also a prison, a library, probably with a *scriptorium* — for several bishops of Scythopolis were renown scholars and writers<sup>22</sup> — and living quarters for servants, clerks and officials as well as for the clergy that formed the bishop's entourage.<sup>23</sup>

Since St. Procopius was in the *episkopeion*, it seems only natural to infer that the bishop had his throne (καθέδρα) in this church, namely, St. Procopius was the city cathedral, at least at the time of Sabas' visit. But had it always been so? Apparently not, for on both Sabas' visits at Scythopolis, in which he was the bearer of imperial letters from Constantinople, the ceremonial reading of these communications was held in an edifice called 'the ancient church', which appears from Cyril's words to have been in a separate place from the *episkopeion*.<sup>24</sup> As was observed by Denis Feissel, the term 'the ancient church' appears to refer to a former episcopal church in any city where it had been superseded by a new cathedral.<sup>25</sup> The fact that 'the

<sup>16</sup> Excavated by N. Makhoul and M. Avi-Yonah: Avi-Yonah 1935.

<sup>17</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 61, 75, Schwartz (ed.) 1939: 162, 180.

<sup>18</sup> The Greek name might reflect an Aramaic 'En Taman (Spring of the Eight) or a toponym Thaiman, Thamma, Thamna, Thamnat, several examples of which are found in Palestine.

<sup>19</sup> Cyril does not say it in this occasion, but in describing Sabas' visit to the recluse Procopius, to which he too took part as a child, he explicitly states that after the visit they 'went back to the *episkopeion*' *Vita Sabae* 75, Schwartz (ed.) 1939: 180, line 27.

<sup>20</sup> This view has been suggested also by Shalev 1990: 295–296 and accepted by Mazar 2006: 56.

<sup>21</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 75, Schwartz (ed.) 1939: 179–180. Sabas had already lodged in the bishop's palace during his first visit to Scythopolis in AD 518, but Cyril does not mention the church in his report of that visit *Vita Sabae* 61, Schwartz (ed.) 1939: 163. 'The house of saint X' is a common way to refer to a church dedicated to a particular saint, and it does not mean that the sanctuary was once the home of that saint or marked the site of his former home.

<sup>22</sup> Patrophilus, the Arian bishop of Scythopolis in the mid-fourth century AD, was renown as a biblical exegete (Sozomenos, *Historia Ecclesiastica* III, 6, 1–2, (eds) Bidez and Hausen 1960: 107; Socrates,

*Historia Ecclesiastica* II, 9, 1–3, Hansen (ed.) 1995: 98. The most famous scholar among the bishops of Scythopolis was Joannes Scholasticus (AD 536–548), whose library Flusin restored from quotes in his writings: Flusin 1983: 17–29.

<sup>23</sup> One of the lay officials who resided in the bishop's palace — or perhaps in the attached hostel or monastery — was Cyril's father himself, in his capacity as the legal advisor of the metropolitan: Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 75, Schwartz (ed.) 1939: 180.

<sup>24</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 61, 75, Schwartz (ed.) 1939: 162–163, 180.

<sup>25</sup> Feissel 2005: 246–249. We find an example in early 5th century AD Gaza, where Bishop Porphyrius (AD 395–420) ended a drought by organizing a vigil in the cathedral church, followed by a procession 'to the ancient church that is to the west of the city, which they say was built by the most holy and blessed bishop Asclepas' Marcus Diaconus, *Vita Porphyrii* 20, Gregoire and Kugener (eds) 1930: 17. Asclepas was bishop of Gaza in the first half of the 4th century AD, when the city was largely pagan, while its port, Maiumas, was mostly Christianized: this is probably the reason why he built his episcopal church between the two towns.



ancient church' in Scythopolis was chosen for such an important and unusual ceremony indicates that it enjoyed a very special status in the city, a status fitting a former cathedral. From the existence of an earlier cathedral church, we can infer that St. Procopius' church was built as a new project, presumably a large and monumental building which either was planned to acquire, or acquired by-and-by, all the structures needed for the administration of a metropolitan see. The Round Church (see Arubas this volume Figures 1: 34; 5) fits this description, and the choice of a lofty position would certainly have played a part in the decision to supplant a former cathedral. The date of the church foundation is unknown but, by the appearance of its masonry and construction, a dating in the late 5th century AD seems reasonable.<sup>26</sup>

'The ancient church' was probably the shrine of the martyr Basilus. We know that it had already existed for some time in c. AD 428, when a priest of this church, Kyrion of Tiberias, retired to the Judean Desert and joined the laura being founded at that time by the saintly monk Euthymius.<sup>27</sup> This shrine was dedicated to a local martyr, probably of the great persecution in AD 303–311,<sup>28</sup> and most likely marked the place of his execution or his tomb; if so, it may well have been erected not long after the end of the persecution. The Latin pilgrim Theodosius, who visited the Holy Land between AD 518 and AD 530, refers to the martyrdom of Basilus as the principal feature of Scythopolis.<sup>29</sup> By its antiquity and its status as the shrine of the city own saint, St. Basilus' Church was a prime candidate to host the earliest cathedra of the city bishop.

Another source, the 6th century AD historian John Malalas, provides us with information about the location of this church: it was rapidly reached from the Samaritan synagogue.<sup>30</sup> The synagogue excavated by Tzori north-west of Tell Iztaba (Figure 1: 9) was identified as Samaritan because of its orientation, the decoration of its mosaic pavement and the presence of an inscription in Samaritan script in one of its side rooms.<sup>31</sup> The excavated Church of Andreas, so called from the contents of its

dedicatory inscription, is less than 250m from the synagogue as the crow flies (Figures 1: 7; 2-3). Its location at the margin of the city suits well an early shrine, erected when a large part of the citizens was still pagan, and probably on the site of an old execution place and/or a tomb.

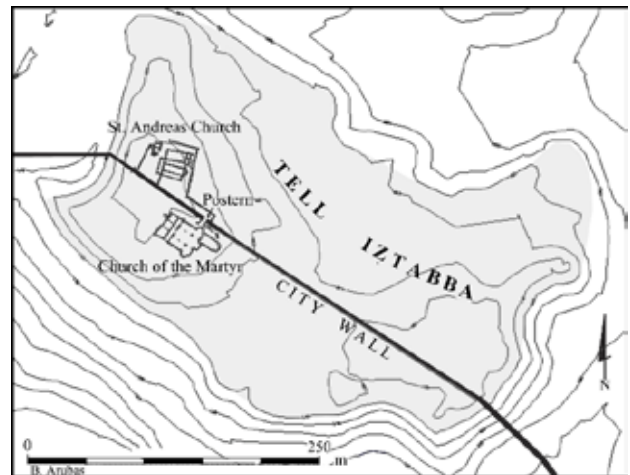


Figure 2. Map of Tell Iztaba (B. Arubas).

### The Church of the Martyr Basilus and its inscriptions

As a result of the discussion above, we suggest identifying the ancient church of St. Basilus' with the church outside the city wall, the so-called Church of Andreas; furthermore, an examination of the inscription in the adjoining church within the city wall will show that this was part of the same shrine, erected at a later period.

### The church outside the city wall

The church outside the wall is relatively small (Figure 4). It has a basilica plan with a single protruding apse, a large room along its north side, and an annex east of it, consisting of a small anteroom and a baptistery. In the eastern part of the apse an empty burial was found. The narthex of the church is bounded on the west side by a row of columns,<sup>32</sup> beyond which is a stone-paved courtyard.

<sup>26</sup> Tsafir and Foerster 1997:109; Arubas, personal communication. A mosaic pavement uncovered in a building recently excavated in the periphery of the compound (Area P) has also been dated to the second half of the 5th century AD: Habas 2006: 650.

<sup>27</sup> Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Euthymii* 16, Schwartz (ed.) 1939: 25–26. Since Euthymius did not accept youngsters, Kyrion must have been a man of mature age, who had raised to the priesthood through the ecclesiastical hierarchy, most likely in the same shrine.

<sup>28</sup> The only mention of his martyrdom is in the Synaxary of Constantinople, which on July 5 has the entry: 'Contest of the holy martyr Basilus and of the seventy martyrs with him, who were martyred in Scythopolis' *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, 5 July, Delehay (ed.) 1902: 800. The number of seventy is of course topic (the seventy elders chosen by Moses, Num. 11: 16–26, the seventy translators of the Bible, the seventy disciples of Jesus etc.) and may just indicate a large group of Christians martyred together, the most prominent of whom was Basilus. Such an event is unlikely to have happened in Scythopolis except during the persecution initiated by Diocletian.

<sup>29</sup> Theodosius, *De situ terrae sanctae* 2, Geyer (ed.) 1965: 116.

<sup>30</sup> John Malalas, *Chronographia* XVIII, from *Excerpta de insidiis* 44 Thurn (ed.) 2000: 373–374. In his description of the breaking out of the Samaritan revolt in AD 529 Malalas reports that on Saturday's

Christian children in Palestine and in the whole East used to pelt the synagogues and the homes of the Samaritans with stones. On one occasion the exasperated Samaritans of Scythopolis came out with swords and chased the children to St. Basilus' Church, where they killed some of them under the very altar, which event started the revolt. The original text of Malalas' work is lost and only a summary is preserved; however, large fragments of the original, including this story, are preserved in a tenth-century Byzantine collection, Constantinus Porphyrogenetus, *Excerpta*. The title of this excerpt erroneously locates the event in Caesarea, the capital of First Palestine, rather than in Scythopolis, the capital of Second Palestine. However, from other sources we know that the cities first touched by the revolt were Neapolis and Scythopolis, while Caesarea came into the picture at a later stage, and the mention of St. Basilus' Church clinches the identification of the city with Scythopolis.

<sup>31</sup> Tzori 1967. The synagogue is not oriented toward Jerusalem, and its mosaic pavement shows the Holy Ark flanked by *menorot*, incense shovels and *shofarot*, but no lulav nor etrog; animal or human figures are also absent.

<sup>32</sup> A feature shared by the early stage of the church at 'Evron, where the eastern portico of the peristyle atrium functions as a narthex, as is indicated by the position of three inscriptions in its lower mosaic floor,



Figure 3. Aerial view of Tell Iztabba west spur (G. Laron).

The area south and east of the building is also paved with flagstones. Some remains of walls around the church led the excavators to suggest that it was part of a monastery, but more likely the compound was just provided with some rooms for pilgrims to rest in. The plan of the complex shows that it was built before the city wall was erected. The church was paved with colourful mosaics, in which three inscriptions were set.<sup>33</sup>

### Inscription 1

Inscription 1 is set within a rectangular frame (1.77x1.08m) in the south-western corner of the small room flanking the baptistery on the south (Figure 5). At the stage of building presented in the excavators' plan the room was entered from the south, after leaving the church through the eastern end on the northern aisle and turning left: this route would have brought the visitor right on top of the inscription, which he would have seen upside down both in entering and in exiting the room, for it was oriented to the east. Together, this location and orientation seem very odd. Even if another entrance to the room had existed from the west, that is, from the northern room, the location of the inscription in the corner, flanking an entering visitor, would have been odd and uncomfortable to read; impossible to read on coming out through the same

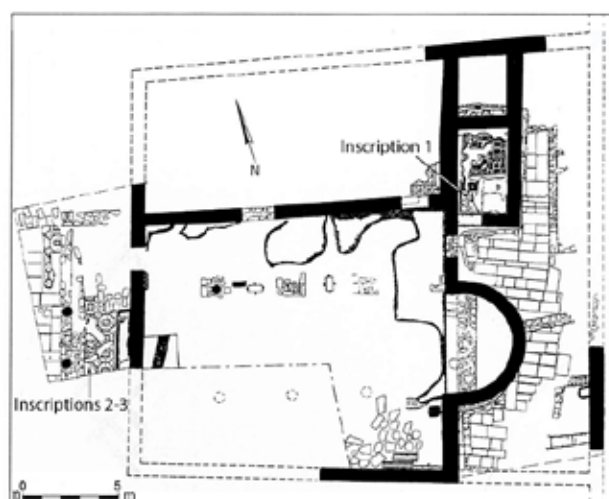


Figure 4. Church of Andreas: plan (T. Meltsen).

hypothetical entrance. This solution must therefore be discarded. We are left to wonder whether the mosaic floor of this room may not have existed prior to the erection of the walls enclosing the anteroom and the baptistery, and of the church itself. The mosaic, or at least the panel containing the inscription, in the southern part of the anteroom, may have formed the pavement of an earlier room; in fact, the bottom frame of the panel is not parallel to the existing western wall of the anteroom. If, as we suggest, the panel belonged to an earlier room, it would surely have been situated on the central axis of this room, the southern part of which was destroyed by the building of the church. As we shall see, based on the shape of the letters the inscription here appears to be the earliest in this church, perhaps earlier by as much as half a century than the inscription in the lower pavement of the narthex.

The frame of the panel is formed of rows of tesserae: black, red, white, and again red and black. The left part of the frame is occupied by a decoration of geometric motifs in the same colours, and the bottom part by two ivy leaves,



Figure 5. Inscription 1 (G. Laron).

dated AD 414/15. See Tzaferis 1987, nos. 8, 10–11, and for the date Di Segni 1997: 238–240, nos. 40–41.

<sup>33</sup> Mazor 2010: 288; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1994: 136–137; 1998: 30–32.



one black, the other red. The characters, 9–11 cm high, are formed of black tesserae; the text opens with a cross and ends with a sprig in the same colour; another sprig, this one red, adorns the end of the second line. The abbreviation of the *nomen sacrum* is marked with a horizontal stroke. The shape of the letters suggests a dating in the second half of the fourth century or at the beginning of the fifth at the latest. Especially characteristic of the earlier period is the form of the *mu* with a low, almost horizontal bar.

✠ T . . . . OI

2 ΠΡΟCΦΕ (sprig)

POMENEYXAPICTOYN

4 TEC ΚΕ̅ (sprig)

✠ T[ὰ σὰ σ]οἰ

2 προσφέ-

ρομεν εὐχαριστοῦν-

4 τες Κ(ύρι)ε.

Thy own things we offer thee in thanksgiving, o Lord.

The last but one letter in line 1 has an odd shape, but can only be a misshapen *omicron*, half round and half square (both shapes common in this period), for the quotation and the available space permit nothing else. This sentence is a paraphrase of I Chron. 29: 14 ('All things come from thee, and of thy own have we given thee'); it was included in the eucharistic liturgy in the liturgies of St. Basilios and St. John Chrysostom. It is often found in inscriptions throughout the East in different abbreviated versions: Τὰ σὰ σοῖ προσφέρουμεν; Τὰ σὰ ἐκ τῶ σῶν (σοῖ) προσφέρουμεν; Ἐκ τῶν σῶν (σοῖ) προσφέρουμεν, or even without the verb.<sup>34</sup>

## Inscription 2

Inscription 2 is set within a round medallion (diam. 96 cm) in the lower mosaic pavement of the narthex, in front of the entrance to the nave, looking east (Figure 6). The script is traced in black letters and is framed by two concentric circles of tesserae of the same colour inscribed in a red octagon. All around the octagon are square frames filled with images of birds and separated by rhombi and triangles. The characters, 8 cm high, belong to the square alphabet and can be dated to the first half of the 5th century AD or the mid years of this century on palaeographical grounds. Two abbreviations by truncation in the first and last lines are marked with diagonal strokes crossing the stem of the last letter. The word *υἱῶν* is misspelled with two iotas, the first of which has a *trema*. Also, the name of

one of the donors appears to be misspelled, for Δοβνινῶς is unattested and unlikely and must represent the common name Δομνίνος, either as a dialectal variant or a faulty copy of the model by the mosaicist.

ΠΡΟCΦ

2 ΔΟΒΝΙΝΟΥ

ΚΑΙΜΕΓΑΛΗΣ

4 ΚΑΙΠΑΥΛΙΝΟΥ

. ΔΕΛΦΩΝΥ·Ι·ΙΩΝ

6 ΓΕΡΜΑΝΟΥ

BENEΦ

Προσφ(ορά)

2 Δοβνίνου

καὶ Μεγάλης

4 καὶ Παυλίνου

[ἀ]δελφῶν υἱ{ι}ῶν

6 Γερμανοῦ

βενεφ(ικιαρίου).



Figure 6. Inscription 2 in the lower floor of the narthex, looking east (G. Laron).

<sup>34</sup> See for instance SEG 8, no. 319 (engraved on a baptismal font in the Shrine of Moses on Mount Nebo); SEG 46, no. 2010 (Beer Shema'); SEG 48, no. 1918 (Kh, Yajuz, Jordan).





Figure 7. Inscription 3 in the upper floor of the narthex, looking west (G. Laron).

Offering of Domninus and Megale, and of Paulinus, brothers' sons of Germanus the *beneficiarius*.

The donors are called brothers, which in Greek can fit a group of siblings of both genders, but also 'sons' (υἱὸν rather than τέκνων), which can only apply to male children. Therefore Megale, a female name, must describe Domninus' wife rather than a third sibling. The donors are therefore two brothers, sons of Germanus the *beneficiarius*, and the wife of one of them. Considering the location of the inscription, at the centre of the narthex in front of the entrance to the nave, their offering paid for the paving with mosaic of the entire narthex.

The *beneficarii* in the Roman army were soldiers chosen for special tasks, often of an administrative character as assistants of the commanding officers. Most inscriptions mentioning *beneficarii* refer to soldiers and belong to the second and third centuries. After Diocletian's administrative reform, the lesser personnel of the imperial and provincial offices, the *exceptores* or scribes, were selected from the *beneficarii* and other military ranks, but soon the military term went out of use. Therefore, the title of the donors' father seems to point to the earlier rather than to the later part of the period indicated above.

### Inscription 3

Inscription 3 is set within a round medallion (diam. 1.27m) in the upper mosaic pavement of the narthex (Figure 7). It is not located exactly above the earlier dedication but slightly to the south in respect to the entrance to the nave, and it is oriented to the west. Inscriptions in the narthex oriented to the west, to be read by the faithful in leaving the church, are rare but not unknown;<sup>35</sup> in this case, however, one wonders if the orientation together with the location may not have been intended to stress the link of this church to its twin on the other side of the city wall. The frame and the script are formed with black tesserae. A decoration of ivy leaves fills the lower section of the

medallion. The first line of the text is completely destroyed and so is most of the last line. The letters, 11cm high, present a mixture of round and square forms; some have noticeable apices. *Psi* would be cruciform but for the apices at the end of its horizontal bar, one upward, the other downward. *Omicron* is drop-shaped. The last but one letter in line 7, though broken, can be recognized as a cursive *delta*, often used in the abbreviation ινδ(ικτιῶνος). The abbreviation ΑΓΙΩ in line 2 may be unmarked but as the mosaic is broken above the *omega*, it is possible that an abbreviation mark was lost there — a horizontal stroke or a lifted *tau* or *stigma* above the letter, all common abbreviations of ἁγίω(τάτος) or ἁγιώτ(ατος) in this period. Another abbreviation, in line 3, is marked with a diagonal stroke. A *stigma* in line 4 stands for (καί). The numeral at the end of line 7 is marked with a horizontal stroke.

Dating inscriptions in square script on palaeographical grounds is difficult, for this script, popular in the 5th century AD, goes out of fashion but does not completely disappear in the 6th century AD and sees some revival in the 7th century AD, especially in the south. However, several elements in this inscription — the noticeable apices, the cursive *delta*, the cruciform *psi* — point to a late date, not earlier than the end of the 6th century AD and possibly the early 7th century AD.

- 
- 2      ΝΟΙΑΤΟΥΑΓΙΩ  
          ΗΜΩΝΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛ
- 4      ΑΝΔΡΕΟΥΣΤΟΠΑΡΟΝ  
          ΕΡΓΟΝΤΗΣΨΗΦΟ --
- 6      ΕΓΕΝΕΤΟΜ . ΙΟΥ  
          ΑΙΩ . . ΔΑ
- [⊕ Προ-]
- 2      νοία τοῦ ἁγίω(τάτου)  
          ἡμῶν μητροπολ(ίτου)
- 4      Ἀνδρέου (καί) τὸ παρὸν  
          ἔργον τῆς ψηφ[όσεως]
- 6      ἐγένετο μ[η(ν)] Ἰου-  
          λίου [ιν]δ(ικτιῶνος) α'.

<sup>35</sup> Examples from the southern and the northern churches at Horvat Karkara, in Galilee, Di Segni and Ashkenazi 2020: 305, no. 1; 307–

308, no. 4 and the Northern Church at Lower Herodion, Di Segni 1990: 183.

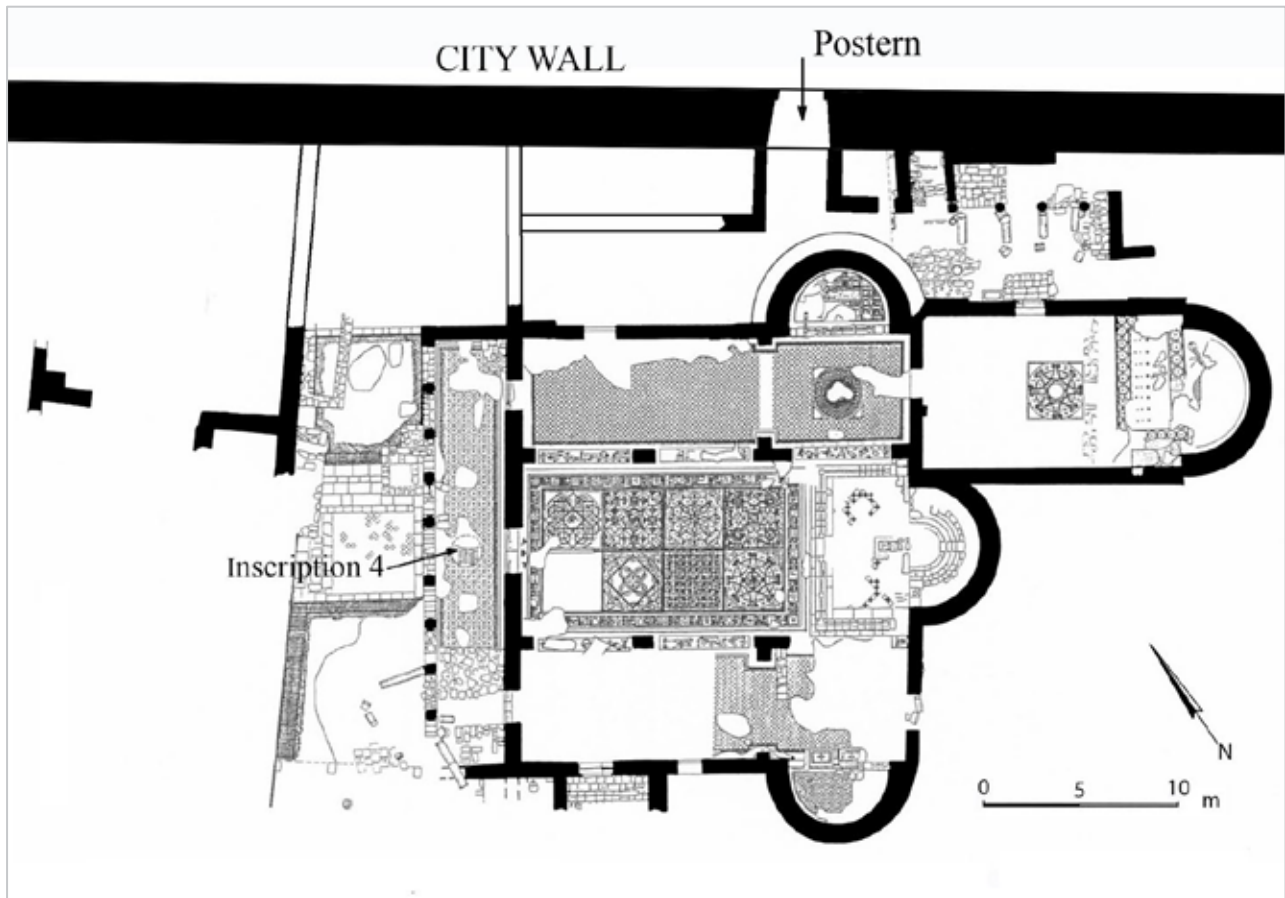


Figure 8. Church of the Martyr: plan (T. Meltsen).

By the provision of our most saintly metropolitan Andreas also the present work of the mosaic pavement was done in the month of July of the 1st indication.

In the period suggested by the appearance of the inscription July fell in a first indication in AD 598, AD 613 and AD 628. All three dates are possible, for there is ample proof that churches were being renovated, and even built, in the Holy Land also in the period of the Persian occupation.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, the Memorial Day of the martyr Basilius, according to the Synaxary of Constantinople, fell on the 5th of July.<sup>37</sup>

#### The church inside the city wall

This basilica, called ‘The Martyr’s Church’ because of its inscription, is part of a compound attached to the inner side of the city wall, slightly to the south of the outside complex (Figures 1: 6; 2-3). A postern opening in the city wall permitted access from this to the old church. The Martyr’s Church is certainly later than the Church of Andreas, as well as much larger and more magnificently built, with an unusual plan (Figure 8): it has a single apse to the east and two more at the ends of a transept, the aisles are wider than usual and the inner space comprising the nave and the aisles is wider than its length. A large chapel entered from the northern aisle occupies the space between the eastern and the northern apses. Three doorways open in the

western wall of the church into the narthex, which in turn opens into an atrium or courtyard. The includes other rooms in unexcavated areas to the west and south of the church, as well as a kitchen adjoining the city wall and a long hall west of it, with a gallery at an upper floor, interpreted as a refectory. This may mean that the church had an attached monastery or a hostel for pilgrims; if the latter, there would have been a few living-in monks and some servants to attend to the guests, without making this a monastic church.

#### Inscription 4

A single inscription was uncovered within a round medallion set in the mosaic floor of the narthex, in front of the entrance to the nave, looking east (Figure 9). The frame is formed by a simple row of black tesserae, and the letters, 11–13cm high, are also black, as is an ornamental motif — a branch carrying two bunches of grapes — at the end of the last line. Most of the left half of the medallion is lost, but the diameter, 1.54m, can be measured in the east-west direction, and its axis can be established, permitting a precise evaluation of the number of characters lost at the beginning of each line. The round letters, *omicron*, *theta*, *epsilon* and *sigma*, are round or oval with no trace of the pointed tops typical of the second half of the 6th century AD. *Theta* has a high middle bar, a trait that appears in the late 6th century AD. The characters are ornate, through the

<sup>36</sup> Piccirillo 2011.

<sup>37</sup> Above, no. 19.



Figure 9. Inscription 4 in the narthex, looking east  
(G. Laron).

use of slight apices on several letters (typical those of *alpha* and *delta* that create a little ‘roof’ on top of the letters), curls in *rho*, *upsilon* and *omega*; especially decorative, and rare, is the use of calligraphic chiaroscuro, namely, the thickening of part of a letter, particularly noticeable in *epsilon*, *omicron* and *sigma*. All these characteristics point to a date in the late 6th or the early 7th century AD.<sup>38</sup> It appears, therefore, that despite the glaring difference between this inscription and the dedication of the metropolitan Andreas in the old church, both belong to the same period, which enables us to restore the lost name of the bishop in the present inscription.

<sup>38</sup> Some examples of calligraphic chiaroscuro can be seen in mosaic pavements in Jerusalem. Cotton *et al.* 2012. I, 2, no. 836 dates from the late 6th century AD, if ‘the most glorious *cubicularia* Theodosia’ is the same noble lady Theodosia whose epitaph on marble, discovered nearby (Cotton *et al.* 2012. I, 2, no. 1006), is dated 14 September 592. Cotton *et al.* 2012. I, 2, no. 875, the epitaph of Anatolia from Arabissos, is dated to AD 614 of slightly later on historical and palaeographical grounds. Cotton *et al.* 2012. I, 2, nos. 824–824 belong to a church dated to the late 7th century AD on historical grounds, but other palaeographical characteristics, beside the chiaroscuro, are later than

- ca 3 letters - ΦΙΔΙΤΙΜΑ

2 - ca - 7 letters - CTONMARTYPA

- ca - 7 letters - OCTOΘPEMMA

4 - ca - 4 letters - YKOCMIAC

- ca - 4 letters - ΔΙΑΦΑΝWC

6 - ca - 2 letters - ΕΦΩΝΤΟ

- ca -2 letters - IMNIOM

[†Ψη]φίδι τιμᾶ

2 [Ἀνδρέα]ς τὸν μάρτυρα

[τῆς πόλε]ος τὸ θρέμμα

4 [δι’ ε]ὐκοσμίας

[ὁ καὶ] διαφανῶς

6 [τρ]έφων τὸ

[πο]ίμνιον.

[Andrea]s, who admirably nurtures the flock, honours with a mosaic the martyr offspring [of the city] with beauty.

The inscription is an epigram of three iambic trimetes, the first two verses occupying two lines each, the third lines 5–7. As usual in late-antique poetry (and already in classical poetry,) they are mostly Archilochian iambs, in which the first foot of each unit is a spondee (two long syllables) rather than an iamb (a short syllable followed by a long one). Two other trends typical of late-antique poetry can be observed: the caesura is often omitted,<sup>39</sup> and short syllables can be treated as long when the accent falls on them — a result of the gradual transformation of the rhythm from quantitative (based on alternation of long and short syllables) to accentual (based on the number and position of the accents in the verse).<sup>40</sup>

those of the above-mentioned inscriptions. Some chiaroscuro effects can also be seen in inscriptions from Madaba and Mount Nebo: see Di Segni 1998: 432, no. 11a–b (597 CE); 434, no. 14 (bishop Leontius, c. AD 603–608); Piccirillo 1992: 219, Pl. 20, ph. 48 (Madaba, Church of the Lions, AD 589); Russell 1998: 129.

<sup>39</sup> Here the caesura is present only in the first verse, where it prevents the assimilation of the last vowel of τιμᾶ and the first of Ἀνδρέας.

<sup>40</sup> An example in the first unit of the second verse, where the second syllable of the first foot, πό-, is short, but is treated as long because it is accented.



Ψηφίδι τι|μᾶ |Ἀνδρέας| τὸν μάρτυρα  
τῆς πόλεως| τὸ θρέμμα δι'| εὐκοσμίας  
ὁ καὶ δια|φανῶς τρέφων | τὸ ποιμνιον.

The man ‘who nurtures the flock’ is obviously the bishop, who is often called ποιμήν, shepherd, in literary and epigraphic texts.<sup>41</sup> The name Ἀνδρέας, suggested by the dating of the inscription, nicely fulfils the requirements of the metre, having three syllables in the sequence long-short-long. But who is the martyr he honours? The choice lies between the two martyrs specially connected with Scythopolis: Procopius, the first Palestinian who was put to death during Diocletian’s persecution of the Christians, whose martyrdom on 7 Khaziran (June) AD 303 is described by Eusebius,<sup>42</sup> and Basilus, of whom nothing is known but the fact that he was martyred in Scythopolis together with 70 companions.<sup>43</sup> Such a large group can only have been composed by local people, and their martyrdom must have occurred during the tetrarchic persecution, for the church dedicated to St. Basilus already existed in the early 5th century AD,<sup>44</sup> and the only violent event mentioned by the sources in Scythopolis before this date, the pagan riots in AD 362, were limited to the desecration of the tomb of Bishop Patrophilus.<sup>45</sup> The fact that Basilus’ cult is unknown outside Scythopolis strengthens the surmise that he was a local man.<sup>46</sup> In the present inscription, the restoration τῆς πόλεως, misspelled with *omicron*, is required by the context as well as by the rhythm of the verse, and the expression ‘offspring of the city’ perfectly suits a native of Scythopolis.<sup>47</sup> As to Procopius, one Syriac version of his Acts says that his family was from Scythopolis and he resided there; the other — adopted by most later reports — that he was from Jerusalem but resided in Scythopolis; both agree that he

served in the local Church, was brought to the governor's court in Caesarea where he suffered martyrdom and was buried. His cult was widespread in Palestine and beyond, but its centre was the church erected in his honour in Caesarea.<sup>48</sup> The Scythopolitans might have endeavoured to vindicate the local origin of Procopius, based on his family ties with their city and his service in the local church, but could hardly have described him as a native of the city, vis-à-vis the tradition that he was a Jerusalemite by birth. All points, therefore, to the identification of the martyr with Basilus.

## Conclusion

The three inscriptions in the church outside the wall demonstrate that this shrine was very early: its first stage, illustrated by Inscription 1, preceded the erection of the excavated church, the first stage of which is dated to the first half of the 5th century AD at the latest by Inscription 2. The church outside the wall has been identified as St. Basilus due to its antiquity and its topographic location with respect to the Samaritan synagogue, and the church inside the wall was also dedicated to the same martyr: it follows that the new building was but a development of the old. The so-called Church of Andreas was not abandoned when the new one was erected, for renovations were carried out in the narthex (Inscription 3), and perhaps in other parts of the building, in the same period when the mosaic with the metric inscription was laid in the narthex of the Church of the Martyr. Of course, dating the inscription does not necessarily mean dating the erection of the new church: only excavations and study of the finds can answer this question. Nor does the dating of the city wall affect the dating of the new church: the old one may well have remained an *extra moenia* shrine for a long time, if security conditions permitted. Structural damage by hostile forces is unlikely to have threaten it: neither enemy armies nor Saracen raiders traversed this area, and even the Samaritan revolt in AD 529-530 did no damage to the church itself.<sup>49</sup> But pilgrims or simply travellers who

<sup>41</sup> So is Theodore, bishop of Scythopolis, who built the bath of the lepers in AD 558/9 (*SEG* 49, no. 2086) and Elias, bishop of Madaba, in an inscription at Mekhayyet on Mount Nebo dated AD 531 (*SEG* 27, no. 1019), and many others: see Mazzoleni 2013.

<sup>42</sup> The long text is preserved in two Syriac versions: Eusebius, *De martyribus Palaestinae*, transl. Cureton 1861: 3–4; 50–51. The connection of Procopius with Scythopolis is not mentioned in the abridged Greek version of *De martyribus Palaestinae*, Schwartz (ed.) 1908: 908.

<sup>43</sup> *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, 5 July, Delehaye (ed.) 1902: 800. Another version of the synaxary Delehaye (ed.) 1902: 777, puts their death on 28 June, apparently because of a confusion with another martyr named Basilus, a priest of Ancyra (Ankara) executed under Julian on 28 June 362, but with no companions.

<sup>44</sup> Thus excluding as a background the killing of pro-Chalcedonians in AD 452 by supporters of Theodosius, the Monophysite who usurped the throne of Jerusalem in AD 451–453, Theophanes, *Chronographia*., ad AM 5945, de Boor (ed.) 1883: 106–107, as suggested by Bollandus in his commentary to the Synaxary in *Acta Sanctorum*.

<sup>45</sup> Philostorgius, *Historia ecclesiastica* VII, 33–33a, Bidez and Winkelmann (eds) 1972: 228: ‘And in Palestine they dug up the remains of Saint John the Baptist, which lay in the city of Sebaste, and scattered them. And moreover, they also dug up from the grave the remains of the holy Papprophilus, who had been bishop of the church in Scythopolis, and scattered all the bones except the skull, which they insultingly hung up and fixed in for use in the guise of a lamp’. Several

sources chronologically and geographically near the events mention destruction of churches and killing of Christians by their pagan fellow citizens in Ascalon, Gaza, Beirut, Heliopolis, and Damascus but not in Scythopolis: see Di Segni and Tsafir 2017: 1030–1031, no. 103; 1047–1048, nos. 122, 122a, 123, 123a.

<sup>46</sup> As a matter of fact, another church dedicated to 'the most glorious martyr Basilius' was discovered at Riḥab, in the territory of Bostra. Its dedicatory inscription is dated between late March and the end of August 594: Avi-Yonah 1947: 69, no. 4; Michel, *Églises*: 212–215, no. 73. If this is Basilius of Scythopolis (rather than Basilius of Ancyra), one might imagine that, on the occasion of the erection of the Church of the Martyr at Scythopolis, and the required translation of Basilius' relics from the old church to the new, the metropolitan Andreas might have donated some bones to his colleague Polyuktos, metropolitan of Bostra.

<sup>47</sup> Notably, *θρέμμα*, when applied to a person, is also used to translate the Latin *verna*, the term describing a home-born slave.

<sup>48</sup> The church was burned by the Samaritans in revolt under Zenon and rebuilt by the emperor, c. 484, John Malala, *Chronographia*. XV, 8, Thurn (ed.) 2000: 305–306. It was supposed to mark the burial of the martyr, according to the Piacenza Pilgrim who visited it c. AD 570: *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 46. Gevea (ed.) 1965: 152.

<sup>49</sup> Anyway, the Samaritans, who lived in the city as well as on its outskirts, could have attacked a church inside the wall as easily as one outside. Ghassanid Saracens under al-Nu'man son of al-Mundir ibn al-Harith, at the beginning of Mauricius' reign (582), raided Arabia down

stopped at the church could be exposed to attack by bandits, especially if they spent the night there, as was often done.<sup>50</sup> The new church offered better security and proper hospitality to visitors;<sup>51</sup> this, together with devotion to the saint and the metropolitan's ambition to leave his mark on the city plan, may have prompted the building of the new complex.

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to the Dead Sea (John of Ephesus, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae pars tertia* III, 42, (ed.) Brooks 1935: 176; transl. Brooks 1936: 131); John Moschus, *Leimonarion* 155, PG 87 iii, col. 3024), but can hardly have reached Beth She'an.

<sup>50</sup> Bands of robbers, among them impoverished peasants and Samaritans dispossessed by Justinian's laws that prevented their inheriting, roamed the countryside. The problem was probably endemic in Palestine, but the following sources refer precisely to the late sixth century and the

beginning of the seventh, before the Persian invasion: John Moschus, *Leimonarion* 165, PG 87 iii, col. 3032; *Vita sancti Georgii Chozibitae* 28, ed. Houze 1888: 126–127.

<sup>51</sup> The question, whether this was a monastic church or just a church with an attached hostel and a team of monks to serve both the church and the guests, is of no importance, for monasteries as a rule had rooms for hospitality and at least one monk charged in turn with the *diakonia* of hospitality.

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# The Christian Topography of Nysa-Scythopolis after Cyril of Scythopolis Historicity Versus Reality

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*The literary sources preserve the memory of several churches and monasteries at Nysa-Scythopolis (Beth-She'an) and in its vicinity. The principal source on the topography of the city is Cyril of Scythopolis, a native of Beth She'an, author of a Life of the monk Sabas, where he describes the holy man's two visits to the city. The extensive archaeological research at the site has brought to light the remains of several buildings identified as ecclesiastical foundations, within the city as well as in its environs. The aim of this paper is twofold: one, to provide an archaeological background to some identifications suggested by Di Segni (this volume); the other, to track Sabas' footsteps as Cyril describes his movements across the city, endeavoring to locate the landmarks mentioned by the hagiographer and to pinpoint the route followed by the holy man.*

**KEYWORDS:** BETH SHE'AN; NYAS-SCYTHOPOLIS; CIRIL; SABAS; THOMAS CHURCH; BASILIUS; PROCOPIUS; EPISKOPEION; ROUND CHURCH; QUADRIPORTICUS; ENTHEMANITH MONASTERY.

## Introduction

Some historical sources of late antiquity (from 4th to the 7th centuries AD) mention by name a few ecclesiastical institutions that existed both within and outside the urban space of the city of Nysa-Scythopolis. In most cases, however, the reference to these institutions is incidental, while the narrator's interest focuses on other issues. Such a mention gains the reliability of an 'innocently spoken' piece of information, but it usually lacks essential details to pinpoint the exact location of the item in the urban space. Without a close acquaintance with the city's landscape, it is difficult for the reader of these sources to grasp a reliable picture of the spatial relations between these sites within the urban layout.

Nowadays, a considerable part of the urban layout of Nysa-Scythopolis is known, due to the extensive excavations conducted at the site (Mazar; Mazor; Arubas *et al.* 2008: 1616-1641). Some of the many remains exposed were identified as churches, monasteries, or other ecclesiastical structures. It is therefore only natural that attempts were occasionally made to identify those structures with buildings mentioned in the literary sources. It should be noted, however, that in the case of a large center like Nysa-Scythopolis there is still a great deal to be discovered; out of about 1600 dunams (160 hectares) of urban space within the city walls and in its suburbs, only some 10% of its total area has been excavated so far.

In looking for the Christian buildings attested by the sources, we are confronted by a singular phenomenon. Almost the entire area of the city center has been exposed and its numerous public structures are well known; yet the urban center of Nysa-Scythopolis in late antiquity (or at least in the 4th and in the first half of the 5th century AD) was found devoid of any religious structures, pagan or Christian. While in other cities of the region in the same period the urban space was filled with ecclesiastical foundations which overwhelmingly demonstrated the impact of Christianity on the social fabric of the city, in

Nysa-Scythopolis Christian presence seems to have been much more restrained. Except for the Round Church that was built on top of the acropolis (Tel Beth She'an), thus inheriting the old sacred site where the temple of Zeus Akraios had stood, no evidence is found of the establishment of other churches in the city center. Only the positioning of the Round Church on top of the acropolis marked the growing predominance of Christianity in the city space, but even this probably occurred at a relatively late date, not earlier than the end of the 5th century AD (Fitzgerald, 1931: 18–33). The slow pace of this process may perhaps be explained by the heterogeneity of the local population, consisting of Hellenes (pagans), Jews and Samaritans, all strong and prosperous communities whose opposition to the growing ascendancy of the Church even Christian emperors and their representatives, the provincial governors, could not easily ignore.

By the 6th century AD, however, Scythopolis had several churches and monasteries, attested by the sources. In the following pages we shall endeavor to offer comments and, if possible, support, to their identification with excavated structures, with the reservations mentioned above: that the sources do not offer unequivocal information, and that a good 90% of the urban area still awaits the archaeologists' spade.

## The Church of St. Thomas the Apostle

St. Sabas' first visit to the city occurred in autumn AD 518, when he was sent by the archbishop of Jerusalem to Caesarea and Scythopolis with imperial letters to be read in the provincial capitals. Sabas arrived at Scythopolis from the west via the Caesarea Road. Here he was welcomed by the inhabitants headed by the metropolitan Theodosius near the 'church of St. Thomas the apostle' (Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 61). Since Cyril writes that the people 'went out' to meet Sabas near the church, we may assume that this was located somewhere in the western outskirts of the city.



Figure 1. Beth-She'an oblique aerial photo annotated, looking northeast (prepared by B. Arubas).

The halakhic inscription in the ancient synagogue of Rehov lists places inhabited by Jews, where the fruits and crops of the sabbatical year are forbidden, and places inhabited by non-Jews, which are exempt from this rule, or 'permitted'. Among the permitted places is the area all around Scythopolis, from its six city gates to localities in all directions. On the west it is permitted from 'the Gate of Zayara' (the Oil Press) till the end of the pavement' (Sussmann 1981: 152). It was suggested to identify this gate with the gate excavated on the northwestern limit of the ancient site, now called 'Caesarea Gate' (Mazor 2001: 206, Fig. 1:4; Tsafirir and Foerster 1997: 103). If so, the phrase 'till the end of the pavement' may refer to the end of the paved road extending some distance from the city gate, which crosses the northwest bridge (Jisr el-Khan and continues along Tel Naharon (see Di Segni this volume Figure 1: 15, 22), where an extramural suburb was identified (Vitto 1980: 214; 1991: 40). It is unclear how far the paved road reached, but it may have extended a few hundred meters farther: scattered sarcophagi along this stretch indicate that the road here was flanked by funerary monuments. Along this section of the road a series of hillocks with ancient remains were observed in early surveys. Some 1200m from the Caesarea Gate are Tell Basul, where the remains of a monastery were excavated in the 1960's by N. Tzori (1962: 190, no. 147; 1974: 227), and Tell Tumas where remains of a church were observed (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 137–138, no. 235). Tell Tumas apparently preserves the name of the church of St. Thomas the apostle mentioned by Cyril of Scythopolis in this vicinity.

## The Ancient Church: St. Basilus

After Sabas' reception the whole crowd entered the city and a liturgy, and a ceremonial reading of the imperial letter were performed in 'the ancient church'. Not much can be deduced from these words on the whereabouts of this church but that it could be accessed from within the city itself. Di Segni (this volume) has shown that 'the ancient church' was most likely St. Basilus, which she has suggested identifying with the older of the two neighboring churches that were unearthed on the western summit of Tell Iztabba (Figure 1), on the northern outskirts of the city (Bar-Nathan and Mazor 1992: 44–45; Mazor and Bar-Nathan 1994: 135–37; 1996: 28–31; 1998: 30–32). The city wall separates the two; one – the so called 'Church of Andreas', named after the bishop who had the narthex paved with mosaic – lies to the north of the wall and the other – the 'Church of the Martyr' – is located within the city boundary, slightly southeast of the former (see Di Segni this volume Figures 2-3). A study of the inscriptions in the 'Church of Andreas' shows that the early stage of this shrine dates from the 4th century, which quite justifies its identification as 'the ancient church'. Based on examples from other cities, where 'the ancient church' was a former cathedral superseded by a new one, Di Segni has also convincingly argued that the 'Church of Andreas', ancient St. Basilus, was the early cathedral of Scythopolis.

Besides the historical and epigraphic arguments raised by Di Segni, the relation of the 'Church of Andreas' to the city wall further supports its antiquity. A glimpse to the



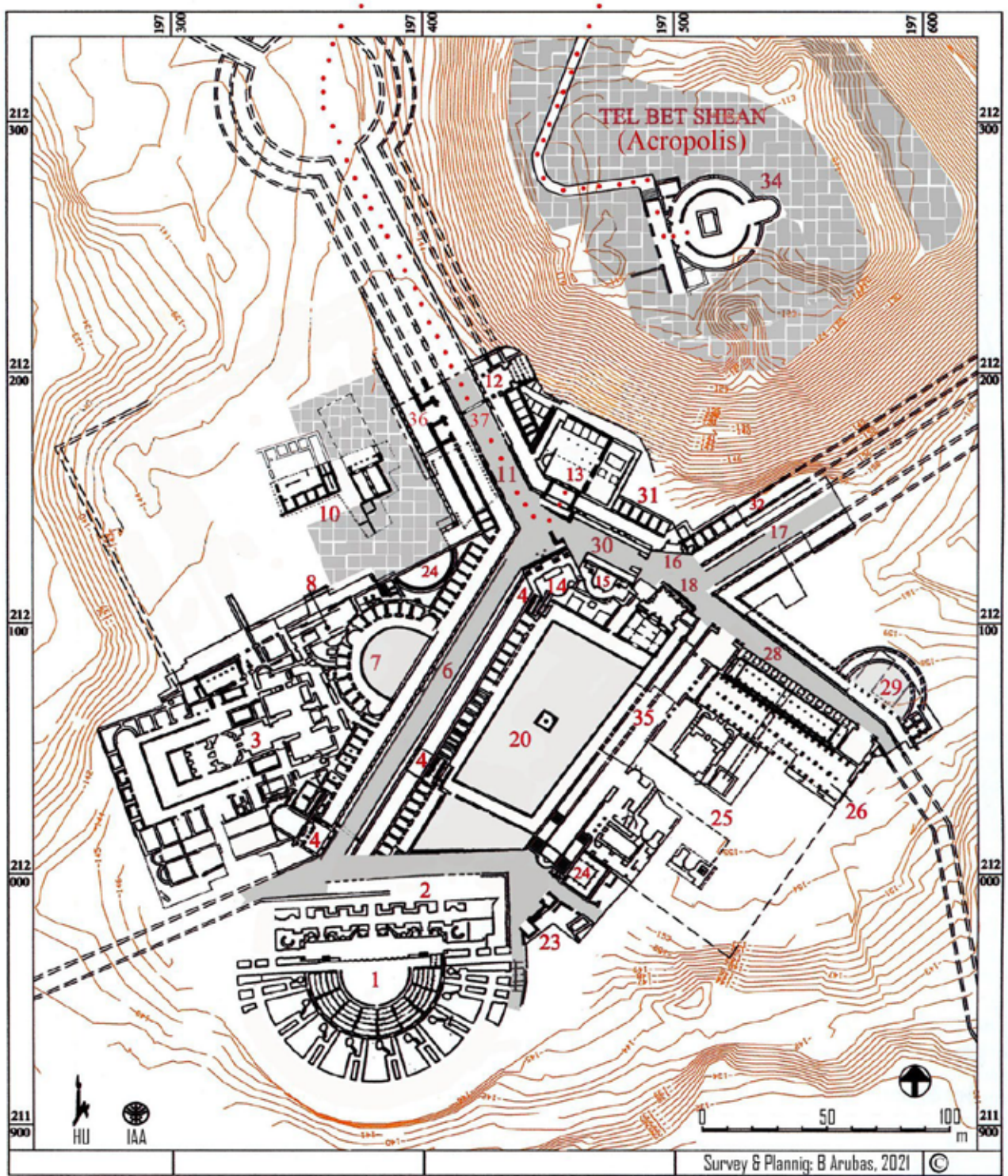


Figure 2. Map of Byzantine city center (survey and planning by B. Arubas).

location map of the two churches in relation to the wall (see Di Segni this volume Figure 2) reveals that the 'Church of Andreas' was built on a west-east axis that deviates significantly from the northwest-southeast axis of this section of the city wall, which adapted to the topography of Tell Iztabba. The 'Church of the Martyr', on the other hand, is aligned with the wall, with a pronounced deviation from a west-east axis. Hence it can be deduced that when the northern church was erected no city wall yet existed here, otherwise it would surely have affected the church's orientation. It seems, in contrast, that the builders

of the southern church were obliged to fit it to the wall that already stood there. The date of construction of the city wall of Scythopolis is not clear: based on general considerations, scholars tend, to attribute it to the 5th century AD (Tsafrir and Foerster 1997: 100–102). Three inscriptions, two of which are identical, the third differs only by the name of the governor and the indication (*SEG* VIII, no. 48; *AE* 1948, no. 140) attest to a renovation carried out in the AD 520s; two others, also identical, mentioned work pertaining to the city wall, are undated but certainly later than AD 535, since the governor mentioned

is ranked as a *consularis* (Tsafrir and Foerster 1997: 100–101, n. 65). None of these inscriptions was discovered in situ. A postern opens in the section of the wall next to the ‘Church of the Martyr’ (see Di Segni this volume Figure 8); without further research, it is impossible to ascertain whether it was created already when the wall was built, to give access to the ‘Church of Andreas’ (St. Basilius) from this part of the city or, only with the building of the new church, to allow a direct connection between the two churches. Even the location of the postern in relation with the two churches provides no hint, for the choice may have been dictated by the topography. In any case, the presence of this opening cannot serve as a pointer to date the foundation of the ‘Church of the Martyr’. But what this postern does prove is that the later church did not supersede the older one, but for a period — probably of many years — the two operated simultaneously as a twin churches. The narthex of the older church was provided with a new mosaic floor bearing the name of the metropolitan Andreas, probably at the same time when the very same Andreas dedicated an epigram to the martyr in the narthex of the later church (see Di Segni this volume Figure 9). Di Segni has convincingly argued that both edifices were dedicated to the martyr Basilius.

It should be emphasized that this postern should not be seen as a typical ornate city gate intended for the use of passers-by, but primarily for the internal use of the occupants of both buildings and for the pilgrims who visited the site. The opening was probably not visible from the outside but enclosed in structures belonging to the northern compound. At some point that postern was blocked and seemingly the outer church, the ‘Church of Andreas’, ceased to be used and was abandoned, while the inner one, the ‘Church of the Martyr’, continued to function until its final destruction.

### The Church of the Martyr Procopius and the *Episkopeion*

During both his visits Sabas was a guest in the *episkopeion*, the bishop’s residence, and describing the second visit in AD 532 Cyril of Scythopolis specifies that he stayed ‘in the house of the holy martyr Procopius (that is) there’. ‘The house’ (*oikos*) of a saint is a common term for a church: in this case, it would have been a church with an attached guesthouse or monastery. Di Segni (this volume) has convincingly refuted the identification of the Round Church with St. John (below) and argued in favor of its identification with St. Procopius. If so, it is reasonable to surmise that the Round Church (Figures 1-3), in its prominent position on the tell (the acropolis), served as the new cathedral of the city, being part of the episcopal compound. Interestingly, C. Fisher, the first excavator of the mound, already suggested that ‘the entire acropolis was reserved for a great ecclesiastical complex, containing some at least of the monastic buildings, the residences of the higher church dignitaries and the buildings in which

were stored the tithes and the supplies ...’ (Fisher 1924: 177–180). Fisher also referred to one of the luxurious buildings on the lower terrace as the Bishop’s House (Fisher 1924:187).<sup>1</sup>

If the identification of the Round Church with the church of the martyr Procopius is accepted, we must place the *episkopeion* on the acropolis too. If this is the case, it allows us to draw possible routes for Sabas’ movements in the city, as well as possible locations and identifications for some of the buildings mentioned in Cyril’s report of the monk’s two visits to Scythopolis (see Figures 2-3).

First, it is important to state that, contrary to a commonly held view, access to the acropolis in the Byzantine period was not by means of the ‘Acropolis Gate’ of the Roman period, which stood at the foot of the mound beside the Northwestern Street (Figures 2: 12; 4).<sup>2</sup> The excavations indicate that this splendid gate and the majestic staircase that led up to the temple of Zeus Akraios were already out of use in the early Byzantine period: the staircase was dismantled and the rear passage of the gate was completely blocked by a wide, high wall. At this stage the former gate was in secondary use as an independent structure. The temple on the summit was replaced by the Round Church and the entire area of the mound around the church was built up as a Byzantine neighborhood of affluent houses, probably for the living quarters and the administrative offices of the metropolitan bishop and his clergy and officials. In order to afford an easier access and flowing traffic to the mound, a paved street of basalt slabs, similar to the other streets in the city, was constructed at this stage (Fitzgerald 1931: 4–5, 11, 19; plan 1). This street branched off from the Northwest Street at a place where a round piazza seemingly marked the intersection. From this crossroad the street climbed up gently to the northwestern corner of the mound, whence it began to wind uphill between the houses of the Byzantine neighborhood towards the summit (see Figure 3). Its track can be followed to its end near the church, where seemingly a flight of steps led directly from the street southward into the narthex (Fitzgerald 1931: 19).

### The Arch (Gate) of St. John

If this scenario is true, Sabas and his entourage must have descended this winding road several times while he was a guest in the *episkopeion* in AD 518 and in AD 532. Cyril of Scythopolis tells of three such occasions during Sabas’ stay in the city: the first, in AD 518, a visit to the recluse John in the monastery of Enthemanih, in the quarter of St. John’s Church (*Vita Sabae* 62–63); the second, in AD 532, a visit to another recluse, the hesychast Procopius, in the quarter of St. Thomas’ Church, and the third on the morrow, when he entered Cyril’s home and blessed the family, on his way back to his laura in the Judean Desert (*Vita Sabae* 75). In all three occasions Sabas must have

<sup>1</sup> He, however, ascribed the church, as well as the whole complex, to Patrophilus, the first known bishop of Scythopolis, rather than to St. Procopius —mistakenly, for Patrophilus, a prominent Arian, was never venerated as a saint.

<sup>2</sup> For an identification of this Roman monumental gate (‘Propylaeum’) as Cyril’s ‘Arch of St. John’ giving access to the Round Church, see Mazor 2013: 48.



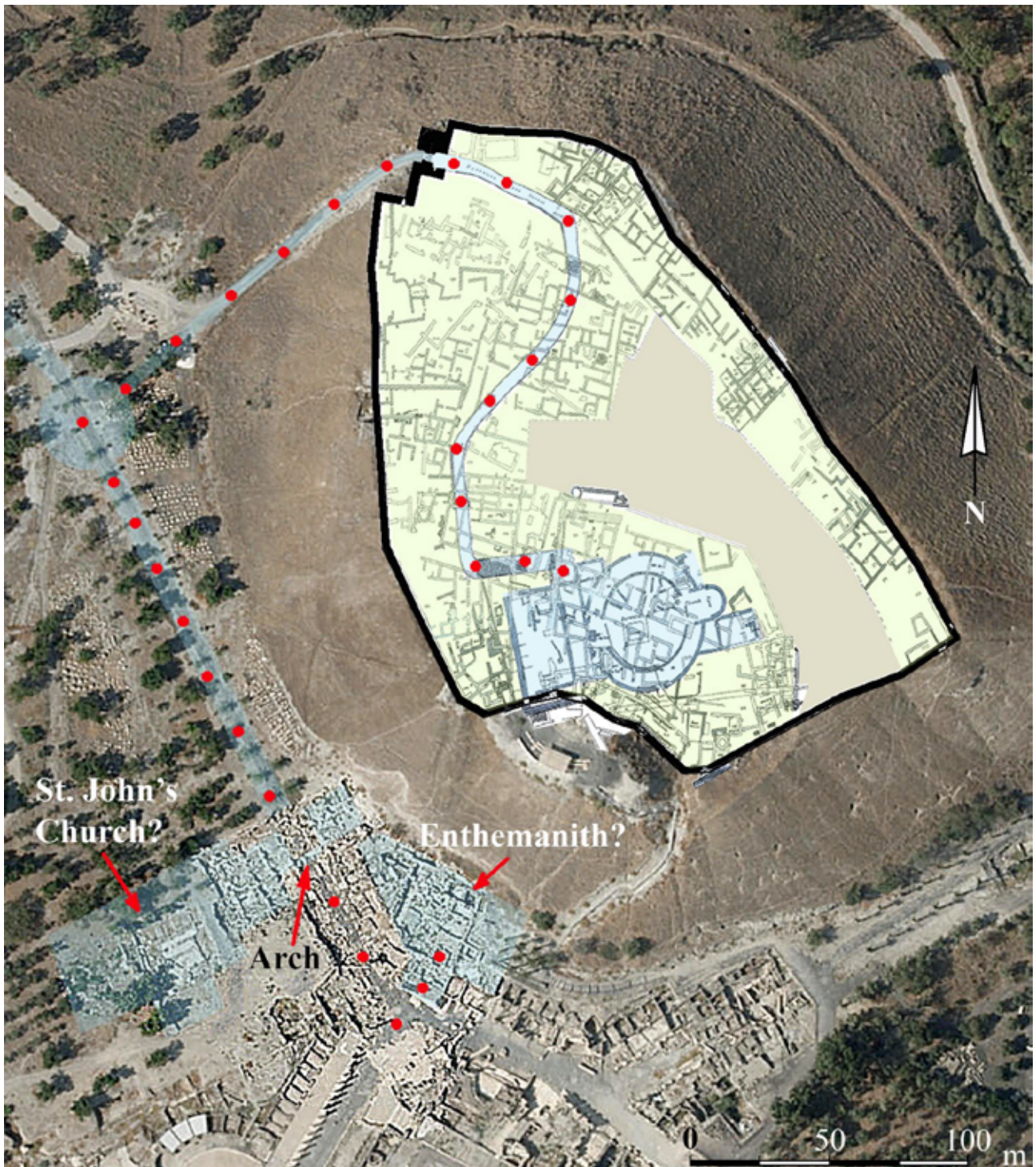


Figure 3. Aerial view of the city center and the acropolis indicating Sabas' route from The Episkopeion and St. Procopius Church (the Round Church) to the monastery of Enthemanith (prepared by B. Arubas based on aerial view from govmap web site and plan 1 in Fitzgerald 1931).

started from the *episkopeion*, where he and his entourage were lodged.

After walking down from the ecclesiastical compound on the summit of the tell, Sabas would have reached the junction with the Northwestern Street. At this point he could have turned right or left. A right turn would have led him out of town along the main road he had walked on his arrival from Caesarea. Such was indeed the route he must have taken when he went out to visit Procopius in the

quarter of St. Thomas Church. On his way to the quarter of St. John's Church, however, we are told that Sabas passed in the middle of the city near the Arch of St. John. To pass through the city from the northern junction of the Northwestern Street, Sabas had to turn left and walk along the street in a southerly direction toward the city center. A few minutes stroll along some 140m brought him to a place where a pair of imposing entrances 'propylaea' stood back from the porticoes on either side of the street (Figures 4-5). The eastern of the two is no other than the 'Acropolis



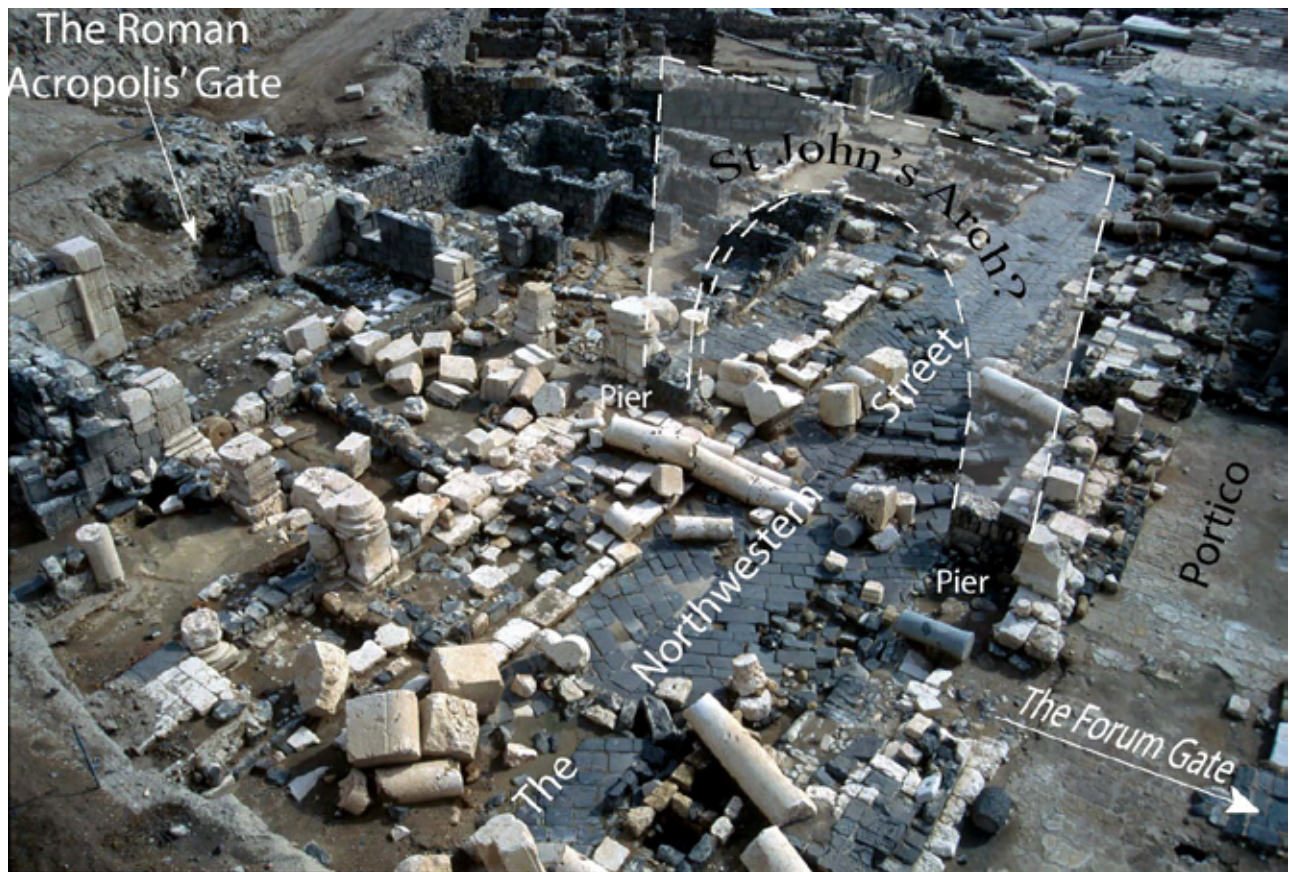


Figure 4. A view of the gates and arch's piers on the paved street. The suggested arch of St. John is indicated above the piers, looking southeast (G. Laron).

Gate' of the Roman period, now blocked and put to some other use. The opposite gate, off the western portico, was also built in the Roman period to serve as the main access to a sizeable walled compound surrounded by porticoes 'Quadriporticus', which we incline to identify as a typical forum-basilica complex of the Roman period in its prime (Figure 2: 9). This complex was heavily damaged, most probably in the earthquake of AD 363, after which it was systematically demolished to utilize its masonry during the early Byzantine rebuilding of the city. At a later period, a considerable part of this derelict area near the Northwestern Street was redeveloped, with the erection of a large Byzantine public complex which was only partially exposed in excavations (Figures 2: 10; 5). The original gate of the Roman compound was restored and maintained its role as the main entrance to the new Byzantine complex.

Monumental gates of this type may sometimes be characterized by an arched central passage. It is not inconceivable, therefore, that one of the two gates we have just described was the one referred to by Cyril as St. John's Arch or Gate (*apsis* in Greek). Since the gate on the east side of the street no longer led anywhere, Cyril's reference may more likely have been to the one facing it on the west

side, which in his lifetime undoubtedly functioned as the main entryway to a complex of edifices.

However, another option might fit the case. The clearing of a section of the street separating the two above-mentioned gates revealed the remains of a pair of ashlar piers of basalt built in the Byzantine period on the street's paving, facing each other across the street. Each of these piers was attached to the front of the corner pillar of the adjacent gate (the Acropolis Gate and the 'Quadriporticus' Gate). Their function apparently was carrying an arch that stretched over the street itself (Figures 2: 37; 4-5). Not enough is preserved of this arch to determine its architectural character but, from the type and dimensions of the piers it certainly could not have functioned as an overpass; rather, it might have been an arch of decorative and symbolic nature that people reaching the city center via the Northwestern Street, one of the main axes of the city, could see and pass through. A few arches from the Byzantine period, whether of this type or of the gate type, are attested along the streets of Scythopolis, as well as in other urban contexts.<sup>3</sup> Since the term used by Cyril in Greek, *apsis*, can denote an arch or a gate (but not an apse), 'the *apsis* of St. John' might have referred to a real arch rather than a gateway. If so, this arch might have been

<sup>3</sup> Fairly informative in this respect is the Madaba Map, which gives a good, though not entirely faithful, graphic representation of such arches scattered in the urban space of Jerusalem. For example, an arch is clearly marked at the connecting point of the Eastern Cardo with the semi-circular plaza on the inner side of the Gate of Neapolis (Damascus

Gate; Bab el-'Amud), in the center of which stands a monumental column. Another arch, or rather an arched gate, is seen at the other end of the same street and one also at the end of the Western Cardo near the Nea Church.



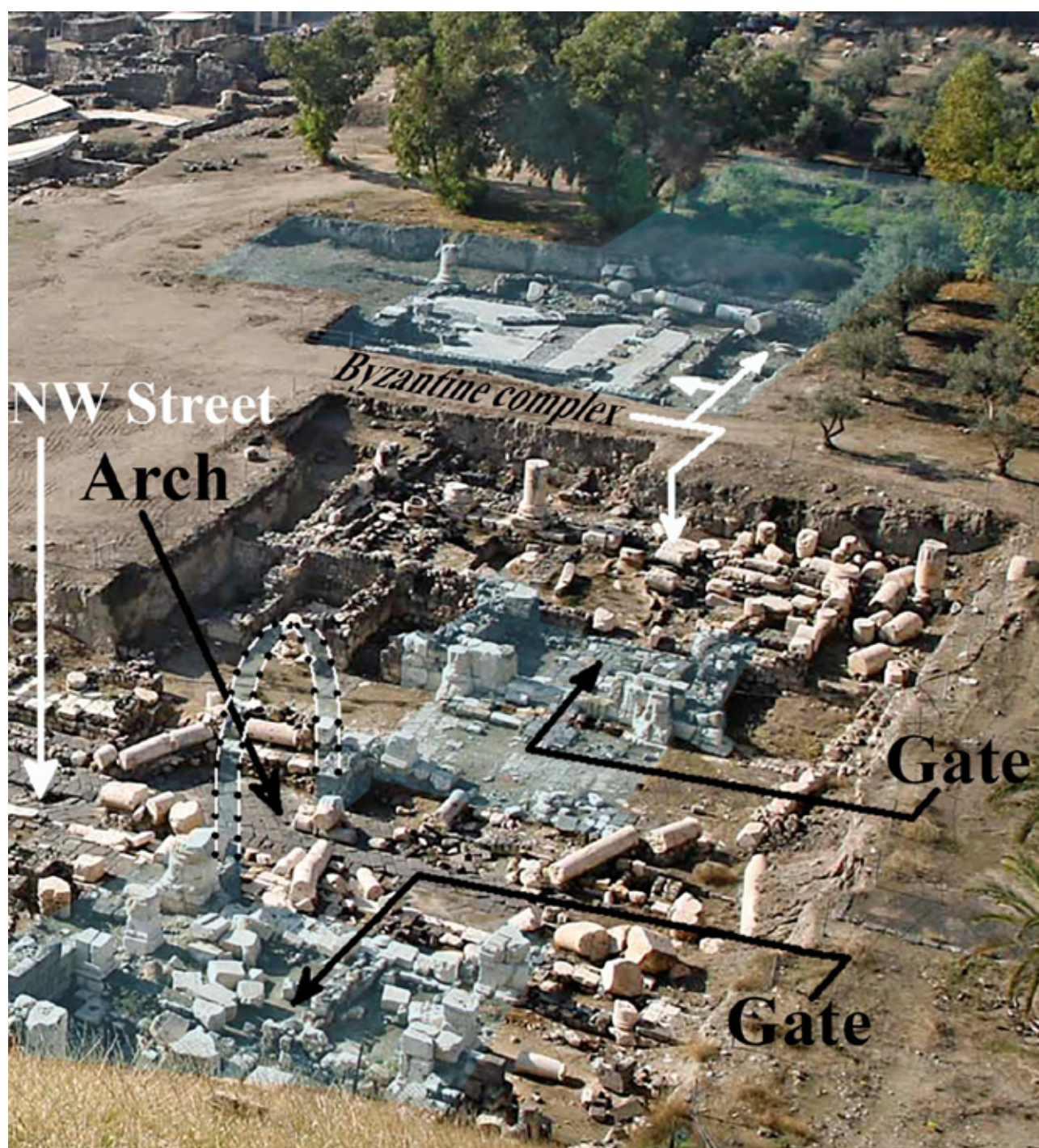


Figure 5. A view of the gates along the Northwestern Street and the Byzantine complex, to its west; looking southwest (G. Laron).

erected in commemoration of the same saint to whom the nearby church was dedicated.

Whichever arch was meant, it is worth noting that in the entire area of the urban center only this section of the Northwestern Street meets the requirement of having a western portico near the arch — the portico where Sabas met and miraculously healed the woman suffering from bleeding (*Vita Sabae* 62).

### The Church of St. John

Since Sabas reached St. John's Arch on his way to the monastery of Enthemanih, 'in the quarter of St. John's Church', the connection between this structure and the church is beyond doubt, whether it was a gate serving as the main entry to the church compound, or an arch installed above the street to provide a landmark marking the nearby presence of this church. Although excavations in the area west of the arch and the gate have not yet uncovered tangible remains of a church, such an edifice may still be found in the unexcavated part of the Byzantine complex that occupies the area of the former 'Quadriporticus'. Only

part of this complex has been exposed and it includes a few large buildings, some of which have multiple rooms, corridors, courtyards and halls, all adorned with mosaic floors (Figures 2: 10; 5). A large marble lintel adorned with a central cross in relief and with remains of a monumental Greek inscription was also found at the site, which may hint to an ecclesiastical context. It is worth noting that this Byzantine complex covers the area of the inner temenos of the 'Quadriporticus', in the center of which seemingly once stood one of the main temples of the Roman city (Arubas 2018).<sup>4</sup> The succession of old worship sites is a well-known phenomenon in the ancient world in general and in the Byzantine period in particular, when churches often superseded pagan temples.<sup>5</sup>

### The Monastery of Enthemanith

From the outset of the trip that brought him to St. John's Arch, Sabas' destination was the monastery of Enthemanith, where he sought to see the saintly recluse Joannes. In the garden of Enthemanith Sabas also performed another miracle, the healing of a girl possessed by a demon (Cyril of Scythopolis, *Vita Sabae* 63). Cyril explicitly states that this monastery was located near the church of St. John: it must therefore be inferred that it was not only situated within the city limits but also in proximity to its public center.<sup>6</sup> Today the entire center of Beth She'an is revealed and open to study, but there is not a single building in this entire area that could be identified as a monastery — except, possibly, one place on its edge. Some 50m south of St. John's Arch Sabas would have reached a piazza where several streets converged. In front of him, on the opposite side of the piazza, he would have seen the gigantic remains of the Tetrastyle Temple (Figure 2: 14). If he turned right, he could have walked down Palladius Street towards the Great Southern Theater (Figure 2: 6 and 1, respectively). If he looked left towards the tell, he would have noticed a magnificent, raised gatehouse (*propylon*): in Roman times this led to a spacious hall attached to the rear wall of the *postscaenium* of the Northern Theater, which was built against the slope of the mound (Figure 2: 13). Seemingly the theater, which may have served in some ritual function, went out of use after suffering severe damage in the earthquake of AD 363. It was thoroughly

dismantled, with only its shell and the magnificent gatehouse left for use in a later construction.

And indeed, within the razed interior space of the theater the remains of a Byzantine building (probably from the early 5th century AD) were exposed (Figures 3 and 6). Much of this complex was damaged by later construction works, but the surviving part shows a row of rooms paved with simple mosaic floors, which were connected through openings to a narrow, elongated hall paved with a geometric mosaic floor. On the other side the hall was bordered by a series of built pillars, indicating that it was connected to an adjacent space. This space is not preserved except for its end wall on the south side, in which a tiny, rounded niche is embedded. The niche preserves a few layers of painted plaster coating; on some of these successive plaster layers figures of saints can be faintly made out. It is evident that the elongated hall, resembling the aisle of a church, and the adjoining rooms, were but one wing of a larger edifice that included a nave-like hall with a series of pillars, of which only the foundations of a few survived. The main building was evidently connected to a multi-room building on the north through an opening breached in the original framing wall. An opening in the southern wall of the former hall indicates a connection to another wing on the south. The excavated part of that wing revealed a water system consisting of a series of plastered pools and a network of pipes and conduits. Of these pools two form shallow twin bathtubs set within a wider space against a larger water tank on the rear side. This space is neatly paved with well fitted bituminous tiles, surrounding the pools. The shape of the twin tubs seems intended for some sort of immersion, maybe for baptismal use. Tumbled stones from arches and domed ceilings were found in collapse inside the pools; the inner side of some of these stones was coated with painted plaster with remains of Greek letters and Chistograms in deep red color. A few pieces of chancel-screen posts, also painted a deep red, were also found at the site. Interestingly, part of the excavated area was covered with a uniform layer of brown-red soil resembling garden soil especially scattered on surface.

Although this cannot be determined with certainty, the nature of this complex points to its possible function as an urban monastery.<sup>7</sup> Its proximity to St. John's Arch and in

<sup>4</sup> Most of the excavations in this area were carried out by the Hebrew University team. The western portion was excavated by the Israel Antiquities Authority team. The entire complex was discussed and identified by them as a 'Caesareum' (Mazor and Najar 2007). Their restored plan places a temple at the center; however, its north-south position in the general layout somewhat reduces the importance of the compound's gate located on the Northwest Street. The Byzantine compound, mostly excavated by the Hebrew University team, is only superficially discussed in this publication.

<sup>5</sup> An example is the Round Church, which inherited the place of the Temple of Zeus and a series of even older temples on top of the mound. The same is true in other places, such as the churches built at the Samaritan cult site on Mount Gerizim, on the temple platform in Caesarea and in the *temenos* in the center of Sepphoris, to name just a few. For another view, somewhat ambiguous, of the issue see: Tsafirir 1998.

<sup>6</sup> In opposition to previous identification, which identify it with a place name called 'Ain et-Tineh' (Arav 1989: 195–196; Mazor 2010: 286–87; 2013: 48; Mazor and Bar Nathan 1994: 136). This name denotes a

spring which was marked in the PEF city plan (SWP II: 104) within Nahal Harod (Wadi Jalud), just to the east of the 'Truncated Bridge' (Jisr el-Maktu'a). This place lies beyond the city boundaries in a deep gorge and nowadays there is no trace of a spring or of any building remains there.

<sup>7</sup> The presence of a monastery within the city boundaries should not surprise. It may not have been the only one in Scythopolis. At least, two were excavated within the city and defined as such; the monastery of Kyra Maria (Fig. 1:8) on the northern bank of Nahal Harod, some 370 m to the west of Tell Iztaba (Fitzgerald 1939) and the so-called 'Imhof Monastery' (Fig. 1: 27), some 175 m southwest of the Caesarea Gate (Tzori 1962: 189, no. 143). Cyril also mentions a monastery called Zougga, which was founded by Abba Cassianus, a native of the city, 'in Scythopolis' (*Vita Sabae* 88). The use of the preposition 'in', rather than 'about' or 'in the vicinity of', as Cyril says about other monasteries founded in the areas of Scythopolis and Emmaus (*Vita Sabae* 33, 35), seems to indicate that Zougga was located within the city walls.



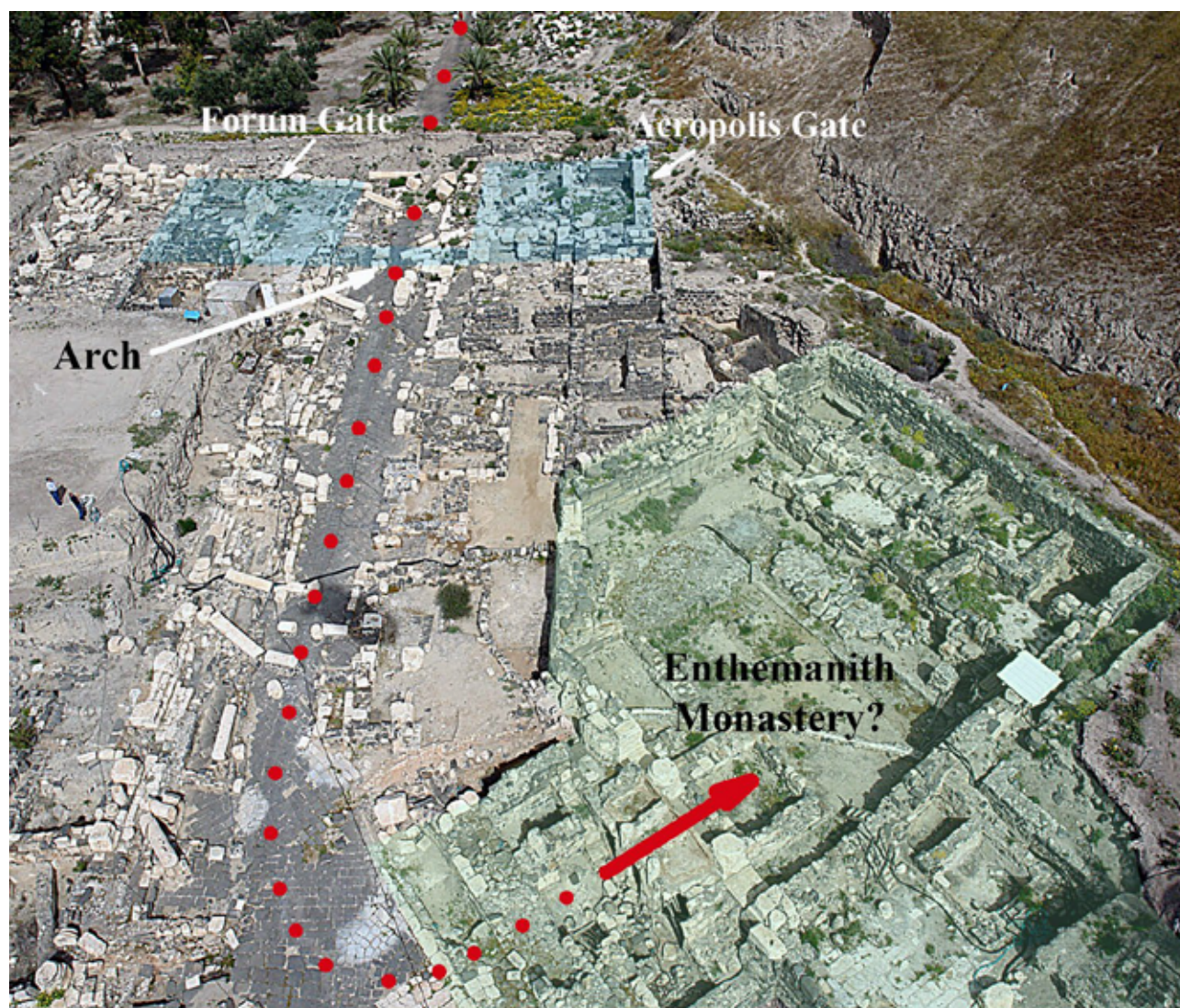


Figure 6. A view of Byzantine remains (Enthemanith monastery?) built into the razed North Theater (on the right) and the Northwestern Street (on the left), looking northwest (Photo by Sky View).

conformity to Cyril's description of Sabas' movements in the urban topography provide a reasonable basis for its identification with the monastery of Enthemanith. The presence of garden soil further supports this identification, for the garden of the monastery is explicitly described by Cyril as the place where Sabas performed the miraculous healing of a possessed girl, to which Cyril's father himself was an eyewitness (*Vita Sabae* 63).

One last trip across Scythopolis is reported by Cyril. On the day following his visit to the recluse Procopius, preparing to go back to his monastery in the Judean Desert, Sabas came to the house of Cyril's parents; after blessing the family, he made his way out of the city with his entourage (*Vita Sabae* 75). The group certainly started from their lodging in the *episkopeion*, and seeing that the most convenient route to go back to the Judean Desert was that of the Jordan Valley — a route Sabas knew well from past travels (*Vita Sabae* 24, 33), it is reasonable to suggest that they took the Northwestern Street past the monastery of Enthemanith, then continued with the Street of the Monuments and Silvanus Street (Figure 2: 30, 28, respectively) towards the southern gate, called *pylé*

*dekumpon* ('Gate of the Camp' or 'Gate of the Hippodrome') in the halakhic inscription of Rehov (Sussmann 1981: 152; Weiss 2001). But a detour from this itinerary cannot be excluded, for we do not know where Cyril's home was located, and this may even have affected the route taken by the monks to exit Scythopolis.

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# The Israeli Mount Hermon – 50 Years of Discoveries

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*In the year 1967, Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) occupied the southern part of the Mount Hermon range, known as 'The Shoulder of the Hermon,' stretching over 80 square kilometers out of the 1500-1800km<sup>2</sup> of the whole range. The harsh climatic conditions on Mount Hermon forced the Israeli authorities to adapt its bases to extreme winds of up to 150 knots. From historical sources, it was reasonable to assume that the Hasmonean and Herodian dynasties had political and military interests in the vicinity of Mount Hermon. Those interests led to intermarriage between the Iturean and the Herodian dynasties. During an archaeological survey and excavations, between 1969 and 1989, over 60 ancient sites, including farms, villages, cult sites and local temples dating from the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods were discovered. The Mount Sumaq village offered clues about how the ancient Itureans adapted themselves to the Hermon climate: Their houses were built of ashlar stones 1.20m thick to insulate them from the harsh winter and summer conditions. The village stretched over 50 dunams and possessed many oil presses. The cult site of Mt. Senaim included an upper cultic enclosure, a lower cultic enclosure, and a settlement. The upper one contained round standing stelae in hewn rooms. The lower cult enclosure contained a Temenos and two richly ornamented temples, partly hewn in the rock. Altars, architectural elements, an offering table with the Greek word 'Temple', and nine fragmentary Greek inscriptions mentioning the dedicators of the temple which included Iturean auxiliary Roman soldiers, was found on a well paved square: The cult site of Senaim functioned until the Byzantine period. The Golan and Hermon survey is an example of scientific achievement.*

**KEYWORDS:** MOUNT HERMON; ITUREANS; ROMAN TEMPLES; CULT SITES; FARMHOUSES; VILLAGES; LOCAL CULTS; SINOPIA PANEAS; QALA'T NIMRUD.

## Introduction

In the summer of 1967, the southwestern part of the Hermon (termed 'Hermon Shoulder') came under the control of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and was thereby under Israeli jurisdiction. It extends c. 80km<sup>2</sup>. from the overall area of Mt. Hermon that reaches c. 1500-1800km<sup>2</sup> (Figure 1: Shmida and Livneh 1980: 27–19; Dar 1994: 27). The article describes the archaeological and historical research of Mt. Hermon and its surroundings.



Figure 1. Hermon map.

Since that time, the Hermon has been a peaceful enticement that drew the attention of hikers and nature

lovers. The author of the article first visited the Hermon prior to it becoming a military zone closed to civilian visitors. Following the construction of the skiing site in 1971, civilian visitors were once again allowed to visit the area (Figure 2).

As a military post was established by the IDF, reserve soldiers began to pay attention to archaeological remains on the Hermon and reported their location and nature to the author of the article. Extreme climate conditions there, the severe winter storms of which often reached 50 knots, damaged various military structures, electrical facilities, and water infrastructure. At high altitude, over 2000m above sea level, the ground freezes, with temperatures reaching minus 10 degrees Celsius. Israeli scholars referred to similar weather conditions studied in Siberia and Alaska. In order to build new infrastructure, foreign experts who specialized in building in extreme climate conditions were invited. Experts from various scientific institutions, including archeologists, were invited to study and advise the IDF on how to cope with the harsh weather conditions (Figure 3; Dar 1993).

In ancient periods, inhabitants of the Hermon successfully matched their settlements to climate conditions, constructing well-insulated stone structures, while paved paths were set in places that were not completely covered by snow. Sheltered and plastered water cisterns supplied the settlements with fresh water the year round. Some of the settlements have underground structures to preserve ice and snow for use in the summer. Permanent settlements did not exceed the height of 1500-1600m above sea level, with agriculture including fruit trees, such as nuts, olive, fig, as well as vines, grains, cereals, and legumes. During





Figure 2. Hermon shoulder, view from southwest in 1970.



Figure 3. IDF post at the Hermon (photo by U. Paz).

surveys, ancient farming remains, terraced fields and water cisterns were documented. They were first assumed to be modern remnants of Lebanese ‘seasonal villages’, but later it became clear that those were ancient farming remnants.

During my military service in 1969, I first studied the archaeological remains at *Jabel Rus* region, later termed Mt. Dov. At the time, I studied archeology and history in Tel Aviv University. I used to present scholars of the archaeology department with pottery sherds collected from sites at the Hermon, describing the remains of stone-constructed settlements, roads and paths, and various installations such as olive presses and mainly masonry structures, which were later recognized as unique cultic sites of Mt. Hermon. My teachers at the university, Yohanan Aharoni, Shimon Applebaum, Joshua Efron, and Shmuel Safrai, encouraged me to continue the survey and

research, the material culture of the Hermon being unknown at the time in scholarly research.

During the years 1970–1973, I conducted an archaeological survey at the Hermon sites that was published in 1978 in a research volume (Applebaum *et al.* 1978). It included research works of the Hermon and its northeastern region. Surveys and excavations presented 35 archaeological sites including farmhouses, villages, cemeteries, olive presses, water cisterns, lead and kahal mining sites, cultic sites, etc. (Dar 1978: 152–165).

### The Village of Mt. Sumaq

At the foot of Mt. Sumaq, at 1352m above sea level, an ancient village covering *c.* 12.5 acres was surveyed. Several dozen rectangular stone structures (10x20m; walls width 1.20m) were observed. Masonry walls on both faces



Figure 4. Mt. Sumaq - view over ancient village and paved road leading to it from the south.



Figure 5. Mt. Sumaq - photograph of typical house remains.

with an inner field stone core supplied proper shelter from cold and winter storms and offered cool temperatures in summer. The houses flat roofs were supported by stone pillars, 45cm diameter. One of the houses had three rooms. Close to the houses, plastered cisterns were observed. At least 5 olive presses were revealed. In the past, it was customarily assumed by experts that olive trees cannot grow in high altitudes over approximately 700m above sea level. Yet in the Hermon they grew successfully at a considerably higher altitude (Figures 4-6).

The village of Mt. Sumaq is surrounded by a 3-4m wide stone wall that runs from the southwest toward Mt. Sumaq. Two constructed roads led to the village. East of the village, we found the remains of a ritual site, constructed of two megaliths, 2.50m high, the base width of which is 1.20m. They are surrounded by an arched wall. At the

base, a carved space, 20cm deep, was observed. The village has a 250 acres agricultural plot. In the valley at the foot of the village, a round water pool, named by the local shepherds, 'Birket Ba'atein (Hebrew *Breikhat Shenunim*), was found. Those pools at the Hermon were used for herds and for field irrigation. The pool walls were sealed with plaster (Dar 1978: 67-69).

During the survey, numerous pottery sherds were collected, now known as 'Golan Pottery'. At first, Golan Heights surveyors could not date them (Epstein and Gutman 1972: 250). Gutman and Urman believed that they should be dated to the Hellenistic period (Figure 7; Urman 1972). In later excavations carried out by Hartal in the northern Golan Heights, the classes of Golan pottery vessels were accurately dated from the Hellenistic to the Byzantine periods (Hartal 2005: 263-269).

Another issue occupied Hermon researchers at the time: Did Jewish communities reside in the Hermon region and if so, when? From historical sources, such as the Book of Maccabees, Flavius Josephus, and the Literature of the Sages, we learn that the houses of the Hasmonaeans and King Herod were active at Mt. Lebanon and Mt. Hermon for several generations, though no archaeological evidence of this was revealed. Coins of the period were found and there might have been some evidence of settlements' names mentioned in the literature. An exception seems to be the Jewish community at *Hazbaya* on Mt. Hermon, whose early stages are not known, though its latest inhabitants moved from *Hazbaya* to *Rosh Pina* in the late 19th century AD. I was fortunate to visit *Hazbaya* with the late Moshe Levy, a descendant of the Jewish community



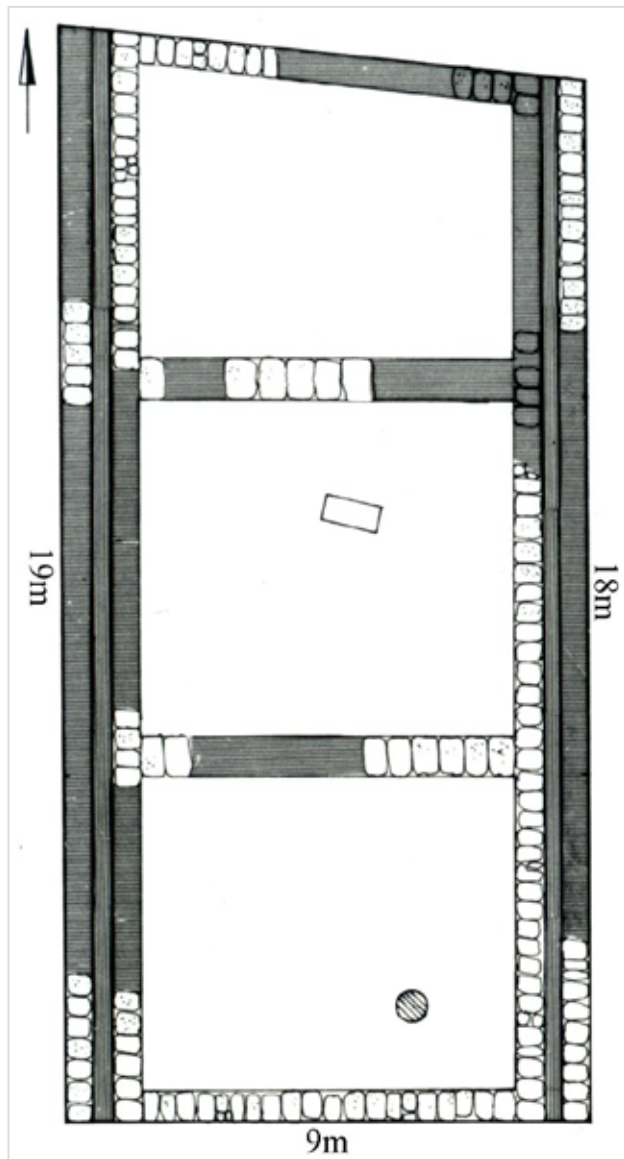


Figure 6. Mt. Sumaq - ground plan.

there, who lives with his family in *Rosh Pina*. We were able to visit the Jewish neighborhood in the area (Dar 1975).

During the 1973 Yom Kippur War and throughout 1974, my military service was in the areas of the Lebanese and the Syrian Hermon. For a few months, we were able to visit villages and sites in the area. We visited cultic sites and temples in the Hermon through the guidance of local inhabitants, photographed the sites and studied the pottery, comparing it to that which had been previously discovered. It became obvious that the entire culture of the Hermon represents an archaeological entity, from Paneas in the south to *Rahla* and *Kfar Kuk* in the north. We were able to visit Mt. Hermon at the heights of 2807m above sea level and explore the remains of its temple and ritual sites. The peak of the Hermon was held by the IDF until the summer of 1974, and we hastened to reach it and admire the world's highest classical temple. Zvi Ilan, a researcher with a keen eye, published a report entitled 'Hermon Summit' (Ilan 1978: 208–216). The IDF installation was established between the remains of the cultic complex, which was not violated. The

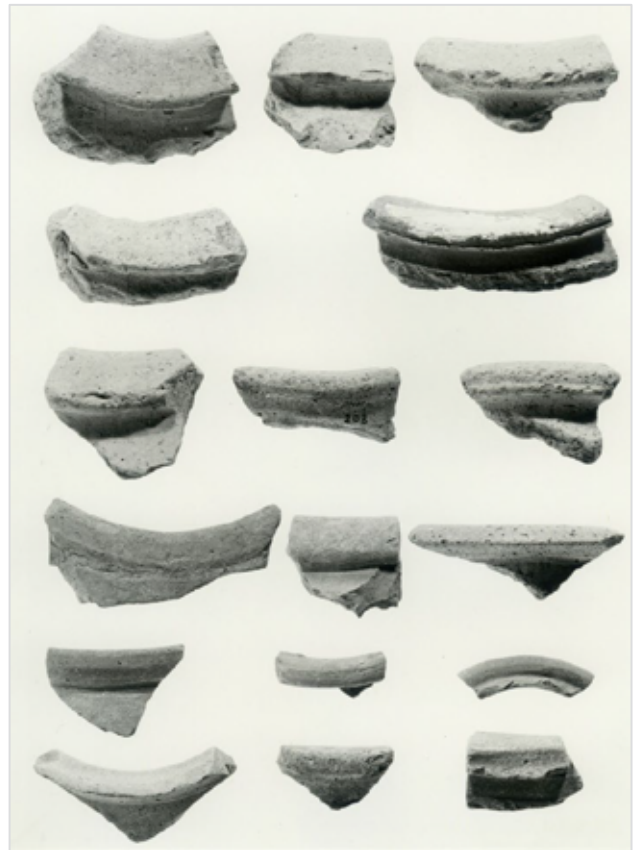


Figure 7. Pottery sherds collected in 1969 at Hermon sites.



Figure 8. Ancient path leading to Qal'at Bustra. Support wall in certain parts is 1.5-2.0m high.

earlier documentation of it was based on researchers from the 19th century (Figures 9-10).

We continued to visit the Hermon during various tours and collected descriptions of antique ruins that were discovered. From 1983 to 1989, we conducted surveys and excavations in many sites within the framework of the department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University. The main excavations were conducted at Mt. Senaim, in Arabic '*Hafur el Qurn*' according to the residents of the region - the '*Hafur el Qurn*' and '*Ras Jabel Halawa*' (the head of Mt. Sweetness) that according to David Amir may have been connected to the tradition of Pan.





Figure 9. A small temple foundation revealed at the Hermon in 1973.



Figure 10. Hermon summit 1974. Niches carved in the rock and beneath a cultic cave.



Figure 11. Mt. Senaim. Round stelae in the upper cult complex over viewing the mountain.

Mount Senaim resembles a dome, c. 400m long and c. 150m wide. The landscape is currently covered by oak trees. At the foot of the mound are two open water pools: the Hafur pool (46.6x35.9m) contains water all year round. Regrettably, its supply channel was destroyed when a military road was constructed. It now serves the modern shepherds of the region. The other pool (20x63m) is located north of the first. Both pools were part of the enclosure of Mt. Senaim, presumably used by pilgrims in ritual ceremonies. In Mt. Senaim, two ritual complexes



Figure 12. Mt. Senaim - offering table from the lower cult complex.

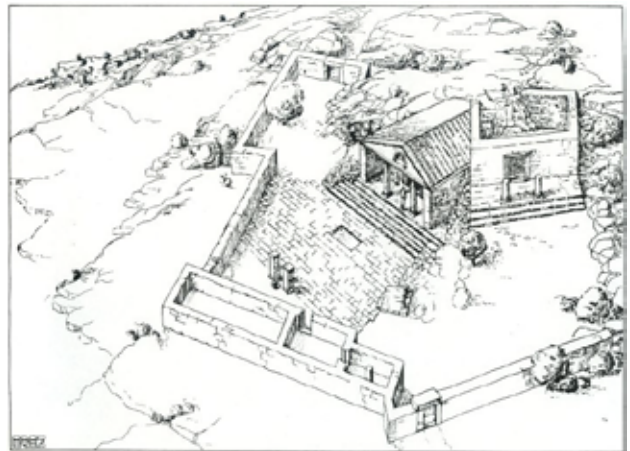


Figure 13. Mt. Senaim - Isometric reconstruction of temples in the lower cult complex.

were investigated, an upper and a lower, along with remnants of a settlement, preserved over 2.5 acres, and a mausoleum and a rock-cut burial cave at the foot of the mountain. In the upper ritual complex, overlooking the deep Senaim wadi, cultic podia, round cultic stelae (*matzevot*), stone-cut basins and carved altars were found (Figure 11). Abundant pottery sherds from the Hellenistic to Roman periods, presumably tossed away at ceremonial cultic feasts, were revealed at the foot of the complex. Additionally, Seleucid coins of the 2nd century BC, a Phoenician coin of late 2nd century BC, Roman coins of the 1st century AD and a coin of Yohanan Hyrcanus I (135–104 BC) were found.

A pair of temples was uncovered in the lower cultic complex of Mt. Senaim. One of them was carved in the

rock. Also recovered were an accurately paved piazza, limestone and basalt stone altars, eagle statues, an offering table with the Greek word 'temple' and dedication inscriptions in Greek (Figures 12-13). The complex is situated inside a temenos (38x58m; see Figure 13; Dar 1994: 57–160).

The Greek inscriptions were deciphered by Nikos Kokkinos from Oxford University. They mention hermits who dedicated money to temple altars, as well as Iturean soldiers of the Roman army, who dedicated altars in honor of emperors Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–180) and Lucius Verus (AD 161–169). Other fragments were dated to reign of Agrippa II who ruled the Hermon and region known in antiquity as 'Lebanon' (Dar and Kokkinos 1992). Other temples and cultic sites were surveyed and excavated, with remarkable finds at sites such as a temple and farmhouse at Qal'at Bustra that regrettably has been damaged by military activity, the site and temple at *Kafr Dura*, the settlement of *Bir an-Sobah* and the cultic structure at its summit, the ancient mines of Mt. Kahal, etc. Altogether, about 60 sites were surveyed, some of which were properly excavated (Dar 1994: 306–315).

### The Hermon and the Itureans

The Itureans, mentioned in the Bible (Genesis 25: 13–15), were noted by few scholars prior to the possession of the Hermon, while references to the Itureans were mentioned only in scientific lexicons and publications. According to Israel Eph'al, the early Arab period researcher, one can learn from the Bible and Assyrian sources that the Itureans were Arab nomad tribes from northern Transjordan and the Lebanon and Hermon Mountains (Eph'al 1982: 67, 100–101). It was Gutman who first referred to them in relation to the northern Golan and Hermon (Gutman 1973). Hartal, who excavated in the northern Golan in the nineties of the 20th century, mainly in the sites of Zemel, Bab el Hawa, and Nimra, established the idea that the Itureans resided in the region during the Hellenistic to Byzantine periods (Hartal 2005: 369–381). His work presents a comprehensive, detailed description of the Itureans' history as early as the Biblical period and their settlement in northern Transjordan, the mountains of Lebanon, northern Golan, and the Hermon during the Hellenistic period. He also deals with the establishment of their politically autonomous entity, their relations with the Nabateans in northeastern Eretz-Israel, their conversion to Judaism and their connections with Herod's House and the marriage to the last Iturean ruler, and their final conquest by Rome (Figure 14).

The pottery vessels, known as 'Golan Pottery,' common in the Hermon and northern Golan Heights, were identified as Iturean pottery by Dar (1978: 121–141; 1994: 317–333), and Hartal (2005: 263–273). Hartal distinguishes five pottery groups that were common from the Hellenistic to the Byzantine periods: The Golan group, Kfar Hanania group, Paneas group, and Hawarit vessels and cooking utensils from late Byzantine period.

Other findings related to the Itureans monitoring system are coins that were discovered at the Hermon and northern

Golan. Three Iturean rulers of the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, Talmai Ben Minai, Lisanias, and Zenodorus, minted bronze coins, in which they termed themselves 'Tetrarch and High Priest,' a term similar to the one used by the Hasmonaean rulers. Daniel Herman published the Iturean coins in various private collections and museums (Herman 2006).

Interesting is the fact that on the currencies of the last three Iturean rulers, gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon were depicted. Iturean research is still carried on and scholars such as Julian Aliquot and Elaine Anne Myers published detailed monographs on the topic (Aliquot 1999: 161–290; Aliquot 2008; Myers 2010). These scholars analyzed historical sources and investigated the early and late Iturean presence in the Lebanon and Hermon mountains. Some scholars rejected archaeological evidence that led to the assumption that the Hermon and northern Golan were Iturean territory. It is generally accepted that the Itureans vanished from historical sources around the 3rd to 4th centuries AD.

### Temples and Cultic Sites at the Hermon

In 2019 the Lebanese government insisted that UNESCO should declare Mt. Hermon and its temples a World Heritage site. About 30 temples were revealed over the Hermon and its environment, most of them dated to the Roman period, though some were built over sites of the Hellenistic period. Christianity persecuted paganism and destroyed many temples at the foot of the Hermon and yet in the survey, temples and cultic sites that continued beyond the Byzantine period (Dar 1994: 158–160) were revealed. Eusebius of Caesarea, 4th century AD, states that at the time, the Hermon was still a sacred entity (Eusebius 1904: 20).



Figure 14. Greek inscription from *Kafr Ain Ata* at the Hermon that refers to local Iturean residences.

The scientific research of the cultic shrines of the Hermon began in the 19th century, when researchers ascended to the mountain summit, and described the remains of cultic sites. Nathan Schur mentions a dozen researchers that presented documented descriptions of the Hermon sites (Schur 1978: 198–205). Charles Warren, the researcher of Western Palestine, reached the Hermon summit in 1869 with guidance of *Rashiya el Wadi's* people. Warren described the summit termed *Qasr Antar* as a plateau bordered by two hills in the north and south. The distance between the hills is approximately 360m, and a third hill is about 550m away. At the southern hill Warren surveyed an



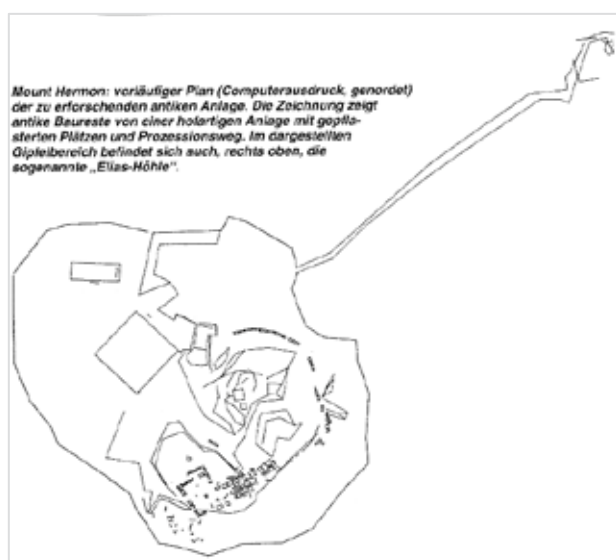


Figure 15. Hermon summit - Temple plan excavated by the Austrian expedition.

oval complex (30x40m) built of huge masonry and at the southern hill, a stone building (c. 10x10m). He assumed that the building was an open structure and termed it a 'ritual site' (Warren and Conder 1884: 530–533). Near the ritual site, Warren found a Greek inscription on a stela that reads: 'According to the mightiest and most holy God's order, those who swear continue on here'. (It is a free translation). Warren assumed that the oval temenos is the earliest shrine at the Hermon summit and that worshipers surrounded it in their ceremonies. It was, according to Warren, the Canaanite Baal Hermon that was still worshiped centuries later, during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

### Austrian Excavations at the Hermon

In 1974, armistice agreements were signed in the Golan and Hermon, following the Yom Kippur War and an Alpine-Austrian unit of the UN Force was set up at the top of the mountain. An Austrian expedition dug the cultic site on the Hermon, supervised by the archaeologist Ervin Ruprechtsberger. The excavation uncovered an oval temenos of a considerable magnitude (c. 70x100m), to which led a ceremonial paved road from the east, nearly 100m long (Figure 15). In the temple they revealed a paved piazza, and the foundations of buildings with masonry entrances that were recognized as cultic sites. In addition, an altar and different service structures were found (Ruprechtsberger 1994). The Austrian expedition unveiled a considerable amount of pottery vessels, metal, and glass. Among the interesting finds are numerous rings, dedicated by pilgrims to the goddesses of the Hermon. According to the excavators, the findings show that the temple and cultic sites were also active during the Byzantine and early Islamic periods and that their constructions resemble Iturean building methods. According to the director of the expedition, the compound architecturally resembles the site revealed at the summit of Mt. Senaim (*Jabel Halawa*) and he assumed that both might have been planned by the same architect. It appears that Warren's survey 125 years prior to the Austrian excavations referred to a small

segment of the cultic compound that has been now fully exposed.

The deities worshiped on the Hermon changed as the ethnic and cultural inhabitants changed over thousands of years. Canaanite Baal Shamin, Baal Hermon and Baal Haddad were always accompanied by goddesses such as the Canaanite-Phoenician Ashtoreth and Atarata. According to Emanuel Friedheim, who researched the pagan cults in Palestine, many gods were worshiped at the Hermon: Dercato Derceto/Dercato?, Hadrenes, Aphrodite and Leucothea, for whom cultic fishponds were constructed for ceremonial feasts (Friedheim 1995; Friedheim and Dar 2010a, b). It seems that similar ponds were also discovered at the temple of Mt. Senaim, Qal'at Bustra, Kafr Dura etc.

### Paneas temples

The cave and Hellenistic-to-Roman period cultic site at Paneas drew the attention of scholars since 1967. One should point out that beside the pagan community of the Hellenistic period, a Jewish community resided at the site as well. Various sections of the Roman and Crusader city, such as residential quarters, tombs, water installations etc., were revealed (Tzaferis 1992: 121–124). Wide-scale excavations (1988–1994) were conducted by Zvi Maoz, who was assisted in his research and publication by various scholars (Tzaferis and Hartal 2008: 1587–1593). Five temples and a presumed Augusteum were revealed at the cultic complex of Pan. The entrance to the cave was regrettably destroyed in the excavations. During the excavations, evidence of the cult of Pan and the Nymphs, Zeus and Nemesis were discovered. Statues of gods such as Asclepius, Athena, Aphrodite, Hera, Dionysus, the Nymphs etc., indicated various cultic practices. It seems that a goat cult dedicated to Pan was also worshiped at the temples: in which over 1200 goat bones were found. The site of Paneas was not entirely uncovered and awaits further excavations (Figures 16-17).

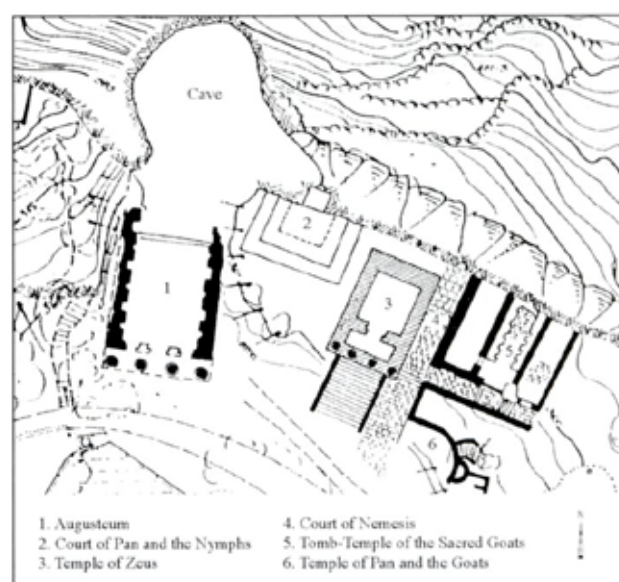


Figure 16. Excavated Paneas temples.





Figure 17. Pan temenos at Paneas.

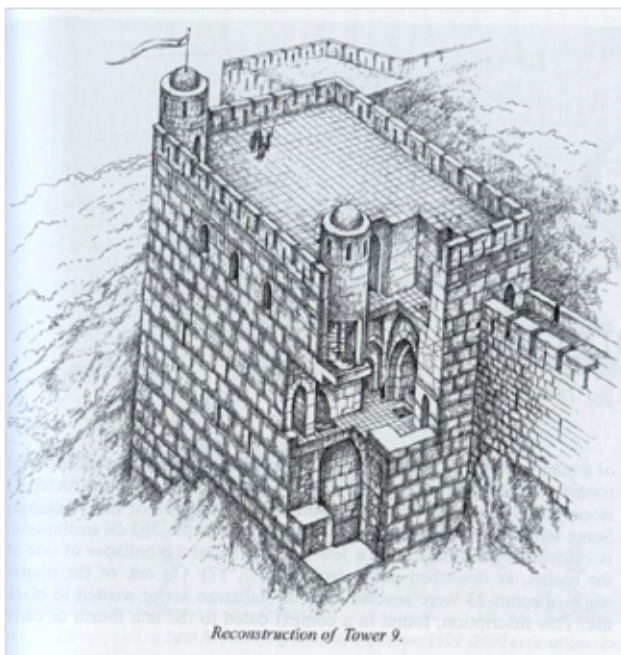


Figure 18. Nimrud fortress – the western tower of the Mameluke period.

### Qal'at Nimrud

It is worthwhile to note the archaeological work that has been conducted by Moshe Hartal at *Qal'at Nimrud* fortress (Hartal 2008). Two towers were excavated and the

construction stages of the fortress by the Moslem rulers during the 13th to 14th centuries AD were analyzed (Figure 18). The monumental inscription of Baibars is the largest ever recovered in Israel. During the Hermon survey (1970–1973), construction remains, pottery and coins from the Hellenistic to Roman periods were revealed along the eastern slope of *Qal'at Nimrud* (Dar 1978: 74). Various scholars presumed as a result that the fortress was constructed over earlier classical remains.

### Survey Publications

The archaeological survey of the Golan region and the Hermon was recently published by Hartal. Sixteen maps of the region have been surveyed since 1983 by various scholars. They present, apart from the surveyed sites, a geographical and historical preface and thus offer a scientific survey of considerable importance available to any regional research. We hope that an English version of the survey volumes will be published as well.

This article is dedicated in friendship to Gabriel Mazor, a colleague and researcher of Nysa-Scythopolis (Beth She'an) and Omrit.

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Johanan Mintzker was the expedition architect in the Mt. Senaim excavations.

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# Temples for the Imperial Cult in the Roman East: The Architectural Aspect

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*Temples for the imperial cult in Italy and the European provinces of the Roman Empire erected in their dozens in the first three centuries of the AD did not differ in their plans, design and architectural decorations, comparing to the temples erected for the Olympian Gods.*

*In Hauran and Trachon, the basalt lands of southern Syria, there are several temples for the imperial cult which differ significantly from those erected in Italy and the European provinces of the Roman Empire. Hauran and Trachon which in the Hellenistic and early Roman Periods were regarded as frontier areas were transformed during the reign of the Antonine and Severan Emperors into important foci of activity in the east of the Roman Empire.*

*Before we shall discuss this peculiar group of temples it should be mentioned that almost all the temples for the imperial cult erected in Italy and the European provinces belong clearly to a category of Vitruvian temples, which means that their plan, design and architectural decoration can be described and examined according to the parameters, terminology and architectural vocabulary as used by Vitruvius in his *De Architectura*. However, the temples which we shall deal with here should be defined as non-Vitruvian. It means that they cannot be described or examined according to the parameters applied by Vitruvius.*

*Thus, we shall focus here on a group of seven temples characterized by the uniqueness and originality of their architecture. These temples were built of local basalt stone and their chief architectural characteristic is their being open structures. That is, their central space was left open, thereby making the approach to it easy and unhindered. In the traditional Graeco-Roman temple the naos was seen as the home of the god and the pilgrims were not allowed to enter the temple. The Hauran-Trachon temples for the imperial cult on the other hand in their open design face the pilgrims and invite them to approach the emperor's statue.*

KEYWORDS: HAURAN; TRACHON; IMPERIAL CULT; ROMAN TEMPLE; KALYBE; ROMAN EMPIRE; ROMAN PROVINCES.

## Introduction

The cult of rulers in the ancient world was a universal phenomenon. And this ruler cult was also not an alien phenomenon for the Greek world, especially after the death of Alexander the Great (356–323 BC). Rulers of the Seleucid, Ptolemaic or Attalid dynasties were accorded a cultic status in their kingdoms. The situation in the Roman Republic was different, but with the rise of Octavianus Augustus and the beginning of the Principate, a ruler cult was instituted in the Roman Empire as well. Julius Caesar, the adoptive father of Octavianus Augustus, was the first to be deified, and the temple erected in his honor in the *Forum Romanum* was the first of the temples built for the imperial cult in the Roman world.

The imperial cult in Italy itself and in the western provinces of the Roman Empire has been documented in the historical sources and has also merited comprehensive academic research. Many of the temples that were erected for the imperial cult in Rome itself, in Italy and in the western provinces, have survived, been researched, and were well documented. The situation is different with regard to the eastern provinces.

Before centering upon the temples for the imperial cult that were erected in Syria, Iudaea-Palaestina and in *Provincia Arabia*, I shall briefly describe a few of the imperial cult temples erected in Rome, Italy and the western and eastern

provinces of the Roman Empire. In addition to the temples, it should be mentioned that other monumental buildings were also erected in honor of the emperors, such as *nymphaea* or special cultic halls in public buildings such as in imperial bathhouses. In this article I shall focus on the temples but will not ignore other structures for the emperor cult erected throughout the provinces.

## Rome: *Forum Romanum* Temple of Julius Caesar

This temple, very little of which remains *in situ* (Figure 1), was erected in the place where the body of Julius Caesar was cremated after his assassination in 44 BC in the Curia of Pompey situated in the *Campus Martius* (Claridge 1998: 62–65; Nash 1968 vol. 1: 512–514, figs. 630–633). We have here a temple that was based on a *podium* (measuring 27 x 24m), with its entrance fronted by a portico of six columns (*hexastylus-prostylos*). The decision to construct the temple was already made in 42 BC, but it was consecrated only in the year 29 BC.

## Temple of Vespasian

This temple, which was built in honor of Vespasian, was begun in AD 80. (Nash 1968 vol. 2: 501–504, figs 1320–1323; Claridge 1998: 79–80; de Angeli 1992). It was erected at the foot of the *Tabularium*, a large-sized structure that borders the *Forum Romanum* on its western



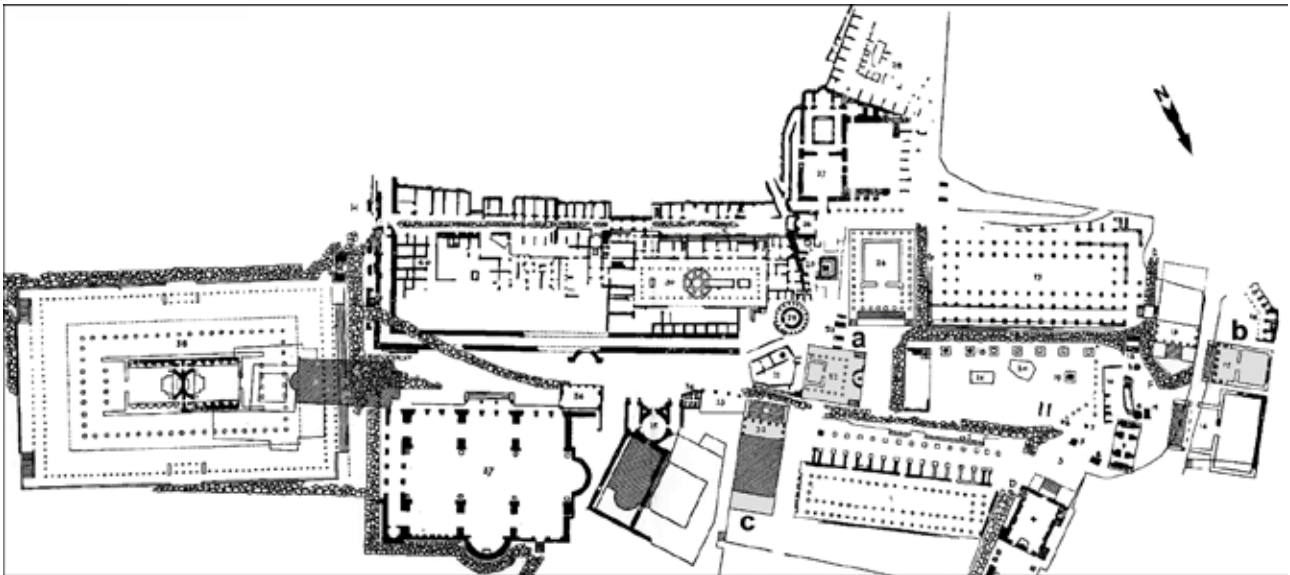


Figure 1. Rome, Forum Romanum, a plan; a. Temple of Julius Caesar; b. Temple of Vespasian; c. Temple of Antoninus and Faustina (After: P. Romanelli 1971. *The Roman Forum*: 2-3, Roma).



Figure 2. Rome, Temple of Hadrian (photo: Michael Eisenberg).

side (see Figure 1). Of this temple as well, only a few remains were found, which comprise among other things, three columns of the portico at the entrance front. The temple was built on a high *podium*, and the impressive stairway leading up to it was walled in by *antae*. Fronting the entrance to the temple was a *porticus* of six columns

(*hexastylus-prostylos*). It appears that the rear wall of the temple adjoined the walls of the *Tabularium*.

#### Temple of Antoninus and Faustina

This temple was built in honor of the emperor Antoninus Pius and his wife Faustina. Unlike the two temples

mentioned above, this one survived for the most part due to its integration with the church of San Lorenzo in Miranda which was constructed in 1602 (see Figure 1) (Claridge 1998: 107–109; Nash 1968 vol. 1: 26–27, figs. 15–17). The temple was situated in the northern part of the *Forum Romanum* with its front facing the central section of the processional way—the *Via Sacra*. Six monolithic columns of the entrance *porticus* have survived in their entirety and support a marble entablature on which an inscription shows that the temple had originally been dedicated to Faustina (AD 100–140), wife of Antoninus Pius (ruled: AD 138–161), but when her husband died, the inscription was changed to include both Antoninus and Faustina. This temple was also designed in the *hexastylos-prostylos* form and excels in the quality of its construction.

#### Rome: *Campus Martius* Temple of Hadrian/Hadrianeum

This impressive temple in the *Campus Martius* was dedicated to the emperor Hadrian by his heir, Antoninus Pius, who constructed it in the year AD 145 in honor of his predecessor (Claridge 1998: 199–201; Cozza 1982; Nash 1968 vol. 1: 457–461, figs. 558–567; Stamper 2005: 212–214). A few surviving remnants of this *peripteros* temple, i.e., a temple that is surrounded by columns on all sides, are integrated today in a large-sized structure erected in the 19th century which serves today as the *bourse* (stock exchange) of Rome. What is still visible today is a section of the *cella* wall and 11 columns of the *peripteron* which surrounded the temple (Figure 2). The significant height of the fluted *peripteron* columns (nearly 15m) made of marble and crowned with Corinthian capitals, indicates that the temple erected in honor of Hadrian far surpassed in size and glory any of the temples erected to honor other

emperors before and after him. Moreover, while the temples built in the *Forum Romanum* were forced to take into account the buildings nearby, the Temple of Hadrian was situated in a wide-open compound, carefully paved and surrounded by colonnades.

#### Italy: Puteoli Temple of Augustus

The remains of the temple of Augustus in Puteoli (today Pozzuoli) were only recently exposed during the course of renovating the ancient quarter of the city (Rione Terra) (Demma 2007; Stillwell 1976: 743–744; Valeri 2005: 25–41). This quarter was seriously damaged by the earthquake of 1983. While the city cathedral was undergoing renovation, the remains of the Augustus temple were revealed. Some of its wall sections were cleaned and later construction work was cleared away (Figure 3). Today, substantial portions of the *cella* walls and the *porticus* columns are exposed, and the original appearance of the temple can be reconstructed. The temple was raised on a high *podium*, with six columns of a portico standing at its entrance front (Bardeschi *et al.* 2006). Between the end columns of the portico and the front wall of the *cella*, four additional columns were inserted, two on each side. These columns were meant to give greater depth to the entrance front of the temple. The two long walls of the temple and the rear wall were decorated with half-columns embedded in them. These half-columns were mounted on Attic bases and supported Corinthian capitals. The plan of the Temple of Augustus in Puteoli was therefore a *hexastylos-prostylos pseudo-peripteros* temple, similar to the temple in Nîmes which is discussed below.



Figure 3. Puteoli (Pozzuoli), Temple of Augustus (photo: Peter Stephansky).



**Dalmatia: Pula/Pola**  
**Temple of Augustus and Roma**

This small-sized temple has survived in its entirety (Pavan 2000; Starac 2004; Stillwell 1976: 72–721; Travirka 2006: 27–31). It was erected at the end of the 1st century BC or the beginning of the 1st century AD. The temple stands on a low *podium*, with a stairway bordered by enclosing walls (*antae*) leading up to its entrance which was fronted by a four-column portico, which means that it was a *tetrastylus-prostylos* temple. The columns of the portico were monolithic and unfluted and were crowned with Corinthian capitals. In order to give greater depth to the entrance of the temple, two additional columns were set up between the end columns of the *porticus* and the entrance front of the *cella*, one on each side (Figure 4). The entablature consisted of an architrave with three horizontal graded strips (*fasciae*) and a frieze decorated with a continuous relief of intertwining plants. The entablature was crowned with a well-designed cornice. The walls of the *cella* on their outer side were left smooth except for their corners which were decorated with fluted pilasters. The corner pilasters were mounted on Attic bases and crowned with Corinthian capitals.

**Gallia Narbonensis: Nîmes**  
**Temple dedicated to Gaius Caesar and to Lucius Caesar**

This temple, known by its modern name Maison Carrée, was built at the beginning of the 1st century AD, and was dedicated to Gaius Iulius Caesar (20 BC – AD 4) and Lucius Iulius Caesar (17 BC – AD 2), the grandsons of Augustus (Amy and Gros 1979; Stillwell 1976: 616–617; Stierlin 2002: 51–53). It is considered by many as the best-preserved Roman temple in the world, and indeed its perfect preservation cannot but arouse wonder (Figure 5). Its plan is identical with the Temple of Augustus in Puteoli mentioned above, which means that it is also a *hexastylus-prostylos pseudo-peripteros* temple. Its measurements are 32 x 15m and the temple stands on a high *podium*, with a stairway enclosed by bordering walls (*antae*) mounting upwards towards the entrance front (Gordon-Smith 2003: 146–147, figs 276–278). A *porticus* of six columns stood at the entrance front, and four more columns were placed between these columns and the entrance front of the temple, two on each side. This kind of column formation gave greater depth to the entrance front of the temple. The two long walls and the rear wall of the temple were decorated with half-column pilasters embedded in them.



Figure 4. Pula/Pola, Temple of Augustus and Roma (photo: Peter Stephansky).



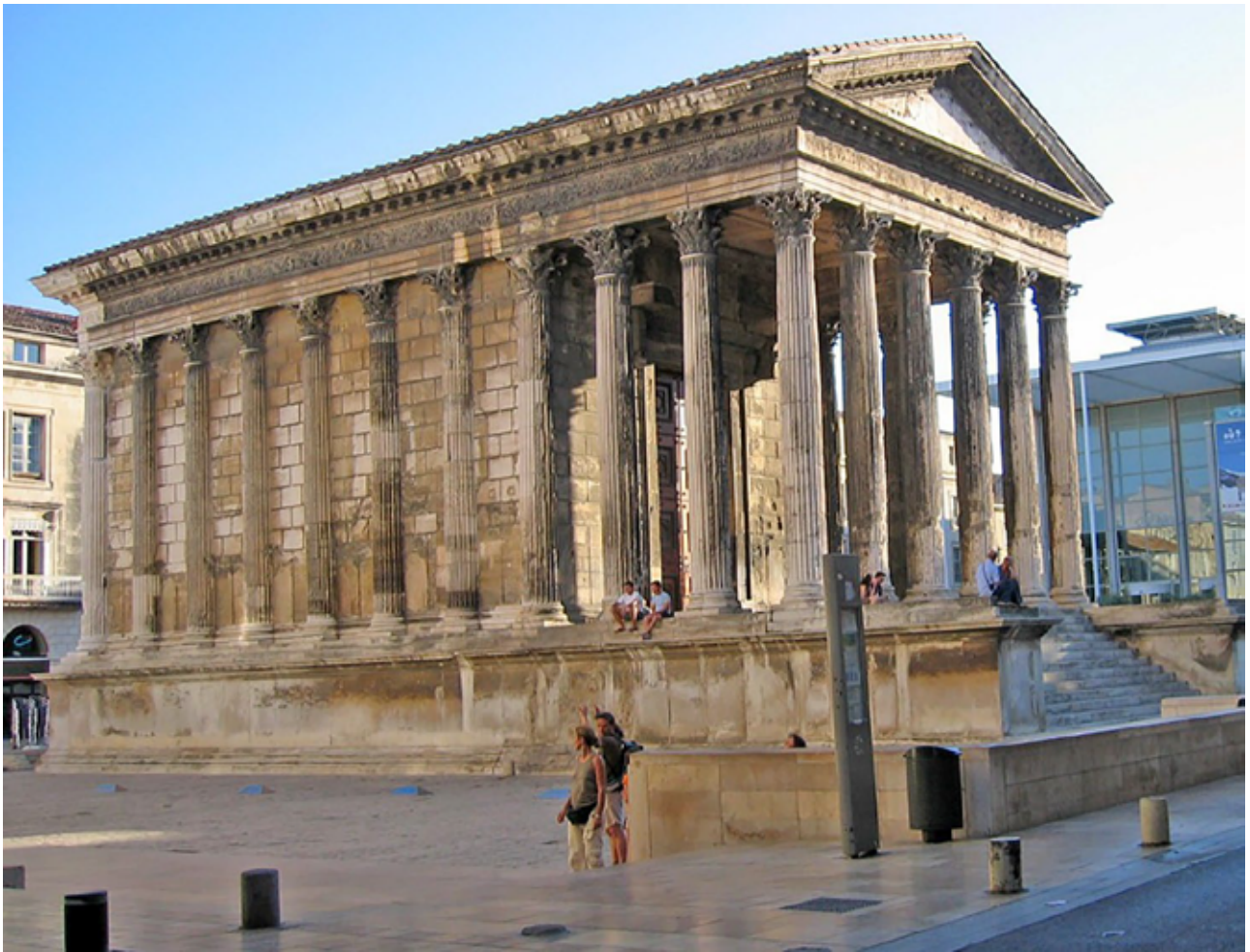


Figure 5. Nîmes, Temple of Gaius Caesar and Lucius Caesar (photo: Michael Eisenberg).

These half-columns were mounted on Attic bases and crowned with Corinthian capitals.

#### **Vienne/Vienna Temple of Augustus and Livia**

Like the temple in Nîmes described above, the temple in Vienne which was erected at the end of the 1st century BC, is also noted for its excellent state of preservation (Figure 6) (Stierlin 2002: 54). It was originally dedicated to Augustus, but in AD 41, during the reign of the emperor Claudius (ruled: AD 41–54), the name of Augustus was paired with the name of his wife, and from then onwards it was called the Temple of Augustus and Livia. The temple, which measures 24 x 14m, is built on a *podium*, with a stairway bordered by enclosing walls (*antae*) leading up to it, and a portico of six columns at the entrance front. Columns were also ranged along the two long walls of the temple, but not along the rear wall. We therefore have here a partial peripteral temple. Vitruvius called this type of Roman temple *sine postico* temple (Vitruvius III, 2, [5]).

A study of the plans, designs, and architectural decorations of the temples erected in honor of Augustus and other emperors in Italy and in the western provinces such as Galia or Dalmatia, shows clearly that these belong to the group of Vitruvian temples. The term ‘Vitruvian temples’

refers to those temples built according to the standards, definition and repertoire of architectural forms defined by Vitruvius (Vitruvius *De Architectura* III, 2). Temples of this kind clearly derive their style of construction from Greek and Roman building traditions, and what is important above all is that they do not differ in any way from the temples that were erected at that time in honor of the gods.

#### **Greece: Province of Achaia/Achaea Olympia: Nymphaeum of Herodes Atticus**

This *nymphaeum* (in Greek: *Νύμφαιον*) is situated north of the sanctuary at the foot of Mount Kronos, between the eastern end of the Temple of Hera and a row of treasuries (Mee and Spawforth 2001: 292, fig. 121; Miller 1982: 17–20; Walker 1987: 60–71). It was built in honor of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (ruled: AD 161–180) and his family, at the initiative and expense of Herod Atticus (AD 101–177) and his wife Regilla.

The main front of the *nymphaeum*, which was 31.20 m long, faced south towards the centre of the sanctuary area. We have here a rectangular pool (measurements: 31.50 x 4.80m), with round structures standing at both ends, one on each side. At the back of the inner wall of the pool, in the centre, there is a semicircular niche 16.50m in width



Figure 6. Vienne, Temple of Augustus and Livia (photo: Shmuel Magal).

(Figure 7). At both ends of the semicircular wall of the niche, short walls bordered the semicircular front. The inner area at the foot of the niche was occupied entirely by a semicircular pool in which the water level was higher than that of the rectangular pool in front of the *nymphaeum*. Each of the two *monopteros* structures that were constructed at both ends of the rectangular pool were built on a round stone base (diameter: 4m) on which stood eight columns supporting a cone-shaped roof.

On the inner surface of the semicircular niche, 22 rectangular niches were carved out and ranged on two levels, 11 on each level. These niches were intended for the placement of statues. Excavation at this site exposed many of these 22 statues which had been mounted in the niches at that time. The statues were of Marcus Aurelius himself and one of his wife Faustina, statues of Antoninus Pius, of Hadrian and Sabina, his wife, and of other members of the Antonine dynasty. Also found here were statues of gods and finally also a statue of Herodes Atticus and his wife Regilla.

### Galatia

#### Ancyra: Temple of Augustus and Roma

The temple in Ancyra (today Ankara in Turkey) dedicated to Augustus and Roma was built between the years 25–20 BC close to the time when the province of Galatia was founded (Akurgal 1970: 283–287, fig. 118; Boëthius and Ward-Perkins 1970: 389–390, pl. 203; Price 1984:

267–268; Stillwell 1976: 54–55). This temple, which is also known as the *Monumentum Ancyranum*, was famed for its long bi-lingual inscription (in Latin and Greek) engraved on the two enclosing walls (*antae*) of the *pronaos*

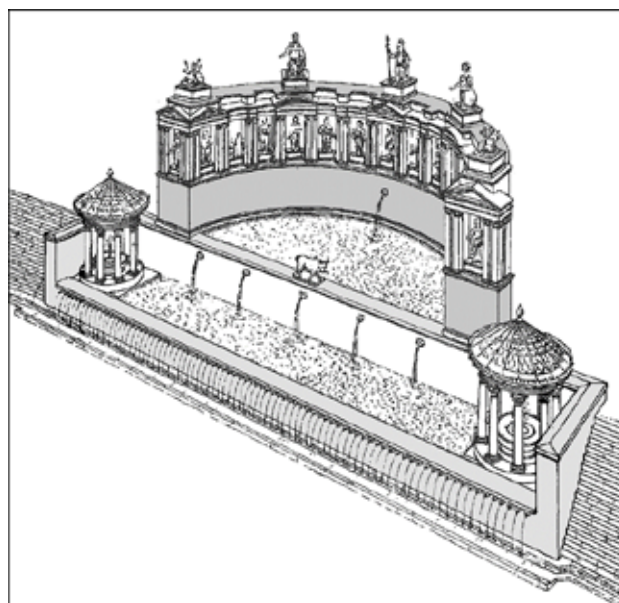


Figure 7. Olympia, Nymphaeum of Herodes Atticus, reconstruction proposal (After: E. Kunze, 'Zur Geschichte und zu den Denkmälern Olympias' 1972, in E. Burck (ed.), 100 Jahre deutsche Ausgrabung in Olympia: 23, fig. 17, München).



in the temple. This inscription was one of the most important historical documents that have come down to us from the Roman world, the will of Augustus in which he sums up his actions on behalf of the state and the people of Rome. The document was entitled: 'The Achievements of the Divine Augustus' (in Latin: *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*). Historians tell us that this document was engraved on two bronze tablets mounted on the sides of the entrance to the mausoleum of Augustus in Rome (Brunt and Moore 1990; Nash 1968 vol. 2: 38–43).

The plan of the Temple of Augustus and Roma in Ancyra is *pseudo-dipteros* (Figure 8) (Vitruvius *De Architectura*

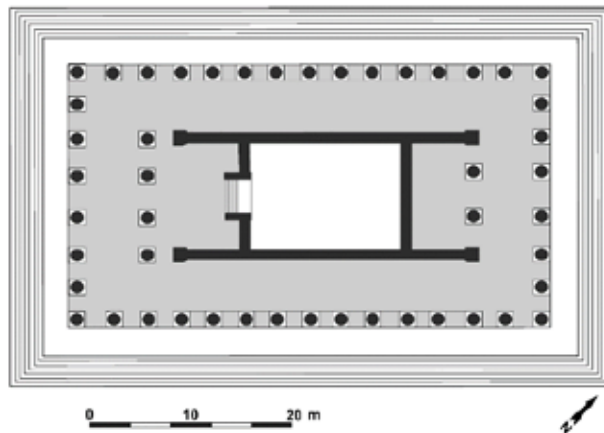


Figure 8. Ancyra (Ankara), Temple of Augustus and Roma (After: E. Akurgal, 1970. *Ancient Civilizations and Ruins of Turkey*: 285, fig. 118, Istanbul).

III, 2 [6]). There were 8 columns standing parallel with the two short walls of the temple, and 15 columns along the two long walls (15 x 8m). Note that the corner columns are counted twice. The measurements of the temple are: 55 x 36m. At the entrance front of the temple, opposite the *antae* of the *pronaos*, a row of four columns was added to give greater depth to the temple entrance.

The temple stood on a graded platform (*crepis*), such as those found in Hellenistic temples. The plan of the temple itself was Hellenistic and not Roman, since it consisted of a *pronaos*, *naos*, and an *opisthodomos*. The latter was merely a space adjoining the rear wall of the temple, enclosed by two short walls (*antae*). The *opisthodomos* could be entered through a portico of two columns standing between enclosing walls (*distylos in antis*). The columns of the *peripteron* were fluted, mounted on Attic bases, and crowned with Corinthian capitals.

### Provincia Asia: Sardis

#### Marble Court/Imperial Hall /Kaisersaal/ Marmorsaal

Throughout Asia Minor during the course of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, a unique type of architectural complex developed that was a combination of an imperial bathhouse and a Hellenistic gymnasium (Akurgal 1970: 124–132; Stillwell 1976: 808–810; Yegül 1992: 250–313, figs 298, 334, 364–365). Scores of such complexes that excelled in their imposing size and magnificence were erected in the cities of Asia Minor, such as those in Ephesus, Miletus and Sardis.



Figure 9. Sardis, Imperial Bath Complex. The Marble Court (photo: Michael Eisenberg).



What is common to these complex structures, in addition to their combination between a typical Roman bathhouse and a Hellenistic gymnasium, was the existence of special halls devoted to the imperial cult (Yegül 1982: 7–31). These halls, that were given various names by researchers, such as Imperial Hall, Marble Court, or *Kaisersaal*, were built along the central axis of the bathhouse-gymnasium complex and served as a transitional link between the two components of the complex. Sometimes they were roofed as halls, and sometimes they were left roofless. Whatever the design of these spaces may have been, they excelled in the grandeur and the richness of their architectural decorations.

The most perfect and impressive example for an imperial hall of this kind was exposed and also reconstructed in the ‘bathhouse-gymnasium’ complex in the city of Sardis (Figure 9) (Freely 1990: 79–84; Yegül 1992: 251, figs 298, 334, 364–365). The hall for the imperial cult was located in the centre of an expansive complex measuring 23,000 sq. m, which constituted a transitional link between the open-air, colonnaded plaza of the gymnasium and the bathhouse. According to the many inscriptions that were found there, the ‘marble hall’ was dedicated to the emperor Caracalla (ruled: AD 211–217), his brother Geta (ruled: AD 209–211), and their mother, Julia Domna (AD 170–217). It may be assumed that it was erected at the end of the 2nd century or the beginning of the 3rd century AD.

The marble hall is shaped in the form of the Greek letter Π. Its main entrance faced the plaza of the *palaestra* and

was separated from it by a portico of double-storey columns. At the centre of the entrance front, along the central axis of the entire complex, there was an arched opening through which one could pass from the marble hall to the bathhouse. Parallel to and adjoining the three walls of the marble hall in the Π-shape formation, stood colonnades of double-storey marble columns supporting an entablature. Above the arched opening was a semicircular niche crowned with a Syrian gable in which a statue of the emperor must have been placed. Additional statues were set up in the gaps between the columns (*intercolumnia*).

### Ephesus Trajan’s Nymphaeum

The *nymphaeum* was built on the slope of the Curetes street, the main street of the city, halfway between the Gate of Hercules and the Celsus Library (Akurgal 1970: 165, fig. 58; Alzinger 1972: 51–52, fig. 53; Stillwell 1976: 306–310). The main front of the *nymphaeum* faced south, towards the street. The structure was erected between the years AD 102–114 by a pair of donors in honor of Artemis Ephesiana, the patron goddess of the city, and in honor of the emperor Trajan (ruled: AD 98–117).

The *nymphaeum* is rectangular in shape and measures 16.50 x 8.50m (Figure 10). It was a double-storey structure that rose to a height of 12m. In the centre of the main front was a square opening through which water gushed into a rectangular pool that extended at the foot of the main front.



Figure 10. Ephesus, Trajan’s Nymphaeum (photo: Michael Eisenberg).

The latter was bordered by two walls on either side of it. Twelve pilasters were ranged along the sides of the waterspout, six on each side. Opposite the pilasters stood columns that supported an entablature on which stood columns that were shorter than those on the lower level. The columns of the upper level also supported an entablature which was decorated with triangular and arched gables.

In the centre of the main front, above the opening through which water cascaded down to the pool, stood a large-sized statue of the emperor Trajan. Many other statues were set up in the gaps between the columns (*intercolumnnia*) on both levels of the *nymphaeum*. Among these were the statues of the imperial family, the statues of gods, and the statues of the two donors.

### **Caria: Aphrodisias Sebasteion**

The series of historical events that occurred in Asia Minor at the end of the civil war which marked the final days of the Roman Republic and the rise of the first imperial dynasty, the Julio-Claudian dynasty, led to the granting of preferred status to the city of Aphrodisias and to its acclamation by the emperors of this dynasty. The fact that the city was named for the goddess Aphrodite, the Roman Venus, must certainly have contributed to the enhancement of its special status (Akurgal 1970: 171–175; Freely 1990: 85–90; Stillwell 1976: 68–70; Yildirim 2008: 35–53, fig. 6). Indeed, beginning with Julius Caesar (100–44 BC) and his adopted son Augustus (ruled: 27 BCE – AD 14), and ending with Nero (ruled: AD 54–68), the last of this dynasty, all these Julio-Claudian emperors regarded Venus as the patron goddess not only of their dynasty but of the entire Roman nation. These brief

introductory words are necessary in order to explain why the Sebasteion, a sanctuary to be dedicated both to Aphrodite (Venus) and to the Julio-Claudian emperors was erected in Aphrodisias. In the inscriptions that were found there, these emperors were given the name of *Sebastoi*, which is a Greek equivalent of the Latin term *Augusti*.

The Sebasteion is a sanctuary consisting of four components as follows:

- A paved processional road (*via sacra*) about 90m long and 14m wide.
- A decorative gateway (*propylon*) installed at the western end of the processional road.
- A temple (*hexastylos-prostylos*), built on a high *podium* and standing at the eastern end of the processional road.
- Two *stoa*-like structures, each one about 90m long and 12m high, standing opposite each other on either side of the processional road.

The first three components of the four listed above are not unique, and what makes the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias into an incomparable sanctuary in the ancient world are the two *stoa*-like structures standing opposite each other (Figure 11). These two structures which are almost identical in their plan and design (each one about 90m in length) are constructed on three floors. The lowest one is made up of rooms opening into the *via sacra* and separated from it by the columns (Stinson 1987: 88–138). The ground floor has no functional use except to serve as a basis for the two upper floors. The fronts of these floors that face the processional road are sealed, and marble panels with reliefs are placed in the spaces between the columns



Figure 11. Aphrodisias, Sebasteion (photo: Walid Atrash).



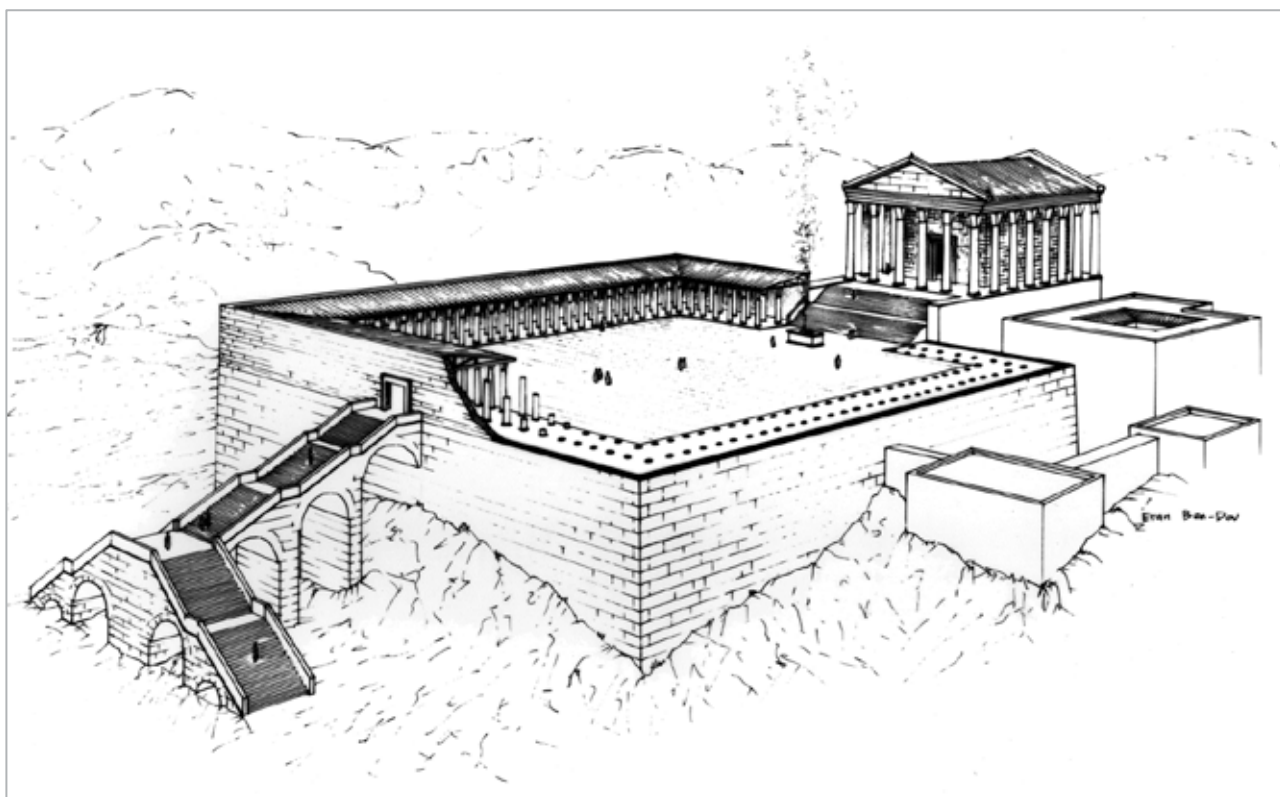


Figure 11. Samaria/Sebaste, Augusteum, suggested reconstruction (drawn by Eran Ben-Dov).

(*intercolumnia*). This implies that the two *stoa*-like structures were only meant to serve as an architectural framework for the placement of large-sized marble panels with reliefs arranged side by side in both storeys of each of the two *stoa*-like structures (see Figure 11). It seems that there were about 50 reliefs in every floor, which is altogether about 200 reliefs. In the excavations held at the site, nearly a third of the original reliefs were found, sufficient in number to determine the content and religious and political messages that the builders of the Sebasteion wished to transmit. A few main subjects appearing in the reliefs can be distinguished, such as the Greek gods, the Roman gods, the emperors of the Julio-Claudian line and their families. The emperors are presented mostly as Greek heroes and not as Roman figures. Most interesting of all is the group of about 50 reliefs that represent the nations (*ethne*) that populated the Roman Empire in the 1st century AD (Ostrowski 1990; Smith 1988: 50–77). Each nation was represented in the form of a woman bearing certain attributes, and each figure was accompanied by an inscription in Greek that indicated the name of the nation being represented.

An analysis, however superficial, of the subjects that appear in the reliefs, will make the main message clear, that mighty Rome is not a conqueror but a ruling force in the world under the patronage of the gods. The Roman gods and heroes are a direct continuation of the Greek gods and heroes. The integration of mythological subjects and figures with the figures of the members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty creates a *mélange* that seem to us today to be strange and even dubious, but in view of the Greek inhabitants of Aphrodisias, who conducted their lives

under the patronage of Rome, the messages were certainly very clear and comprehensible (Price 1984: 53–78; Woolf 1994: 116–143; Zanker 1988: 301–302, figs 234–235).

#### **Iudaea: Samaria/Sebaste Augusteum**

A temple in honor of Augustus in Samaria (Sebaste), the *Augusteum* in its Latin name or the *Sebasteion* in its Greek name, was erected by King Herod of Iudaea (ruled: 37–4 BC) around the time when Samaria was included within the reaches of his kingdom, that is to say in the year 30 BC (Josephus Flavius, *Jewish War* I, 21:2; *Antiquities* 16: 298) (Millar 1993: 27–43; Stillwell 1976: 800).

The temple and the sanctuary were built at the highest point of the acropolis. Since there was no place at the entrance front of the temple for the sanctuary courtyard, it was necessary to create a broad artificial expanse (85 x 74m). The temple and sanctuary were built along the same longitudinal axis, so that the temple and sanctuary created a clear axial, symmetrical and frontal alignment (Figure 12) (Segal 2013: 252–257, figs 295–300).

The temple was raised on a high *podium* which stood about 6 m above the level of the sanctuary courtyard. An impressive stairway ascended towards the *podium* (its length was approximately 11m), positioned between enclosing walls (*antae*). The measurements of the *cella* were 28 x 16m, with one doorway in the centre of the northern front. Along the length of the two long walls of the temple stood seven columns, and at the northern entrance front there were six columns (the corner columns are counted twice). It seems that no columns were placed



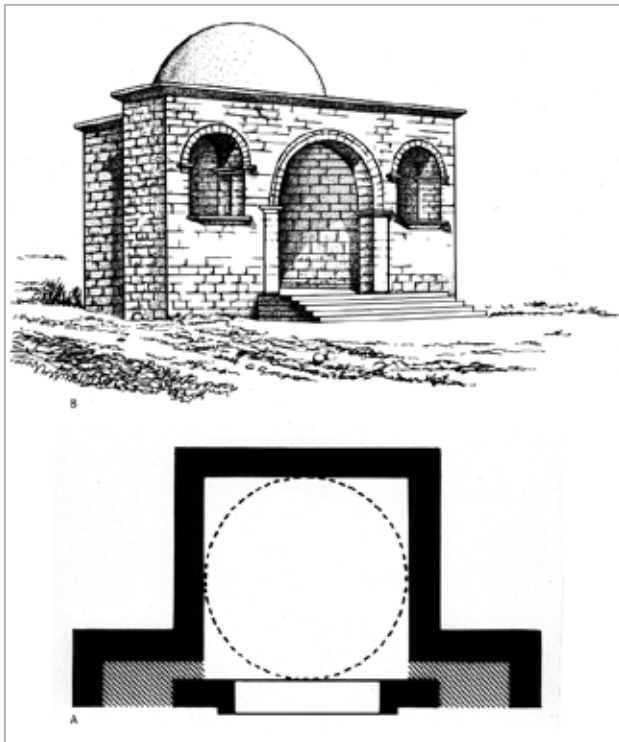


Figure 13. Umm Iz-Zetun, Temple for the Imperial Cult (From: M. de Vogüé 1867. *Syrie centrale*: pl. 6 Paris).

along the rear wall of the temple since it adjoined the rear wall of the sanctuary. We may therefore define the plan of the Temple of Augustus in Samaria as a partial *peripteros*, or as it is called by Vitruvius - a *sine postico* temple (Vitruvius III,2 [5]). This is distinctly a Roman plan which was unknown in Greek-Hellenistic architecture. Herod, as we know, frequently included distinctive Roman-type constructions among his building enterprises, which faithfully expressed his world outlook regarding the place of Iudaea in the new world order that was gradually emerging in the Mediterranean Basin during the reign of Augustus. Also, the fact that this was a temple dedicated

to Augustus was a reason for Herod to build it in a purely Roman architectural style.

#### **Provincia Arabia: Umm Iz-Zetun Temple for the Imperial Cult**

This temple was built in a small village at the southeastern end of the Trachon, about 10 km north of Philippopolis (Segal 2013: 183–184, fig. 180). The temple was designed as a structure with a single square-shaped hall roofed with a dome (Figure 13). The hall was reached by a stairway and was entered through an arched doorway as wide as the hall itself. The entrance front was extended by the addition of short walls on the left and right side of the entrance, one on each side. Carved into each of these walls were semicircular niches roofed by half domes. At the temple front, two inscriptions were engraved which testified that the temple, referred to as a *kalybe*, was dedicated to the emperor Probus (ruled: AD 276–282). This term was used for another six temples discussed here. All of them were erected in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD and were dedicated to imperial cult (Segal 2001: 91–118, figs 1–22).

#### **Shakka/Shaqqa Temple for the Imperial Cult**

Shakka, which is ancient Saccaea, is in the southeastern part of the Trachon, at a distance of about 8km from Umm Iz-Zetun. The temple in Shakka greatly resembles its neighbor in Umm Iz-Zetun and is essentially a square hall with a wide entrance and arches in the wall of the entrance front (Figure 14) (Segal 2013: 184–185, figs 181–182). Short walls were added to the sides of the entrance, like annexes, one on each side, and were decorated with a pair of square niches crowned by arches and placed one above the other. Next to each of the lower niches, in the upper part of them, there were horizontal brackets or corbels made of stone, a pair on each side (see Figure 14), on which statues could be mounted. Opposite the entrance front extended a rectangular platform, as wide as the

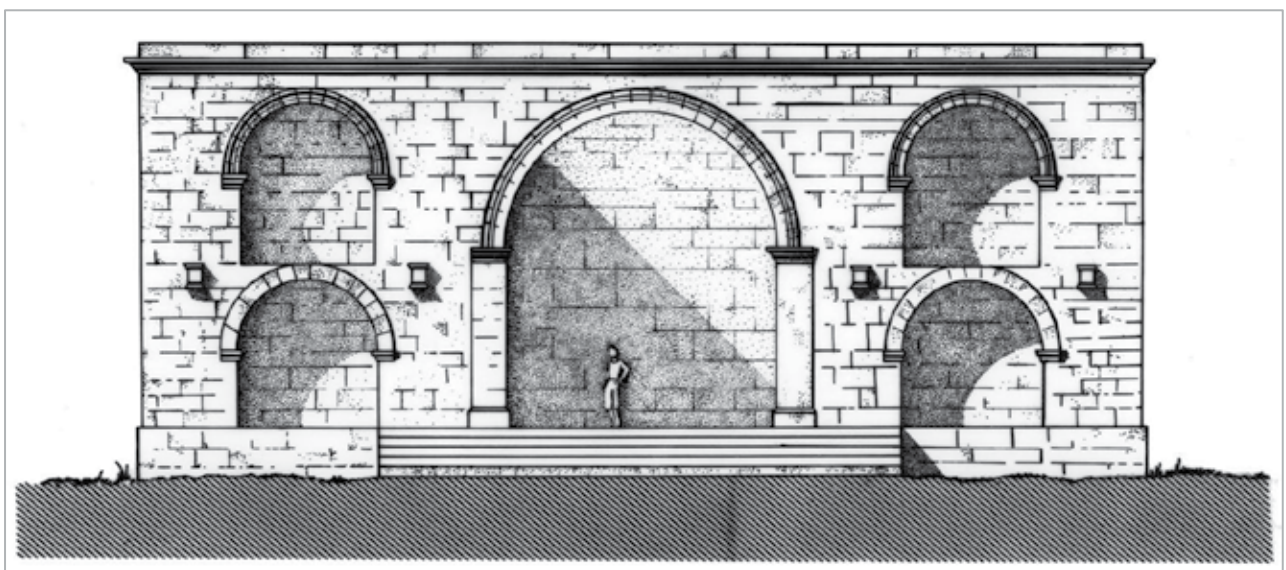


Figure 12. Shakka, Temple for the Imperial Cult (From: M. de Vogüé 1867. *Syrie centrale*: pl. 6, Paris).

entrance front, with a narrow stairway leading up to this plaza.

The single hall in the temple was roofed with a stone dome that rested on four stone squinches placed obliquely above the four corners of the hall. These squinches made it possible to place a round dome over a square space.

## Il-Haiyat Temple for the Imperial Cult

The site of the temple is in the southeastern area of the Trachon, at a distance of about 7km northwest of Shakka. We have here a broad-shaped temple with an east-west longitudinal axis, and a plan of three halls ranged in a line that is almost identical in dimension (Figure 15) (Segal 2013: 182–183, fig. 179). The central hall, which had apparently been roofed with a dome, faces northward with an arched doorway. The width of the doorway is almost the width of the hall. The central hall rose to a height of two storeys while each of the two side halls was divided horizontally into two floor levels. The halls on the ground floors had small doorways and the windows on the second floors were located exactly above the doorways. Two stairways leading to the upper floors were set into the thick walls that divided the central hall from the side halls. It is worth mentioning that a semicircular niche roofed with a half dome was in an unusual place, between the arch over the central doorway and the western window. The size of this niche allowed for the placement of a statue within it.

## Kanawat/Qanawat/Canatha Temple C for the Imperial Cult

Kanawat was one of the main cities in the Hauran, and its history is well documented in historical sources. Temple C

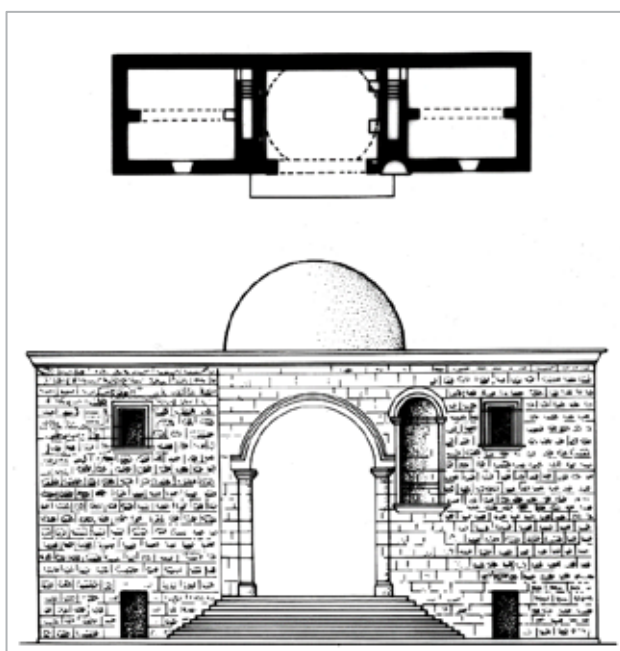


Figure 14. Il-Haiyat, Temple for the Imperial Cult  
(From: H.C. Butler 1903. *Architecture and other Arts, PUAES, Part II*: 398, fig. 143, New York).

is one of the three temples in the city that were researched. This temple is integrated today in an extensive church complex of the Byzantine period, but the plan of Temple C, which is dated to the end of the 2nd century or the beginning of the 3rd century AD, is clear (Figure 16) (Segal 2013: 199–200, figs 207–212).

This temple is a rectangular structure with an entrance front facing north and a *stoa* of four columns placed within enclosing walls (*tetrastylus in antis*) (see Figure 16).

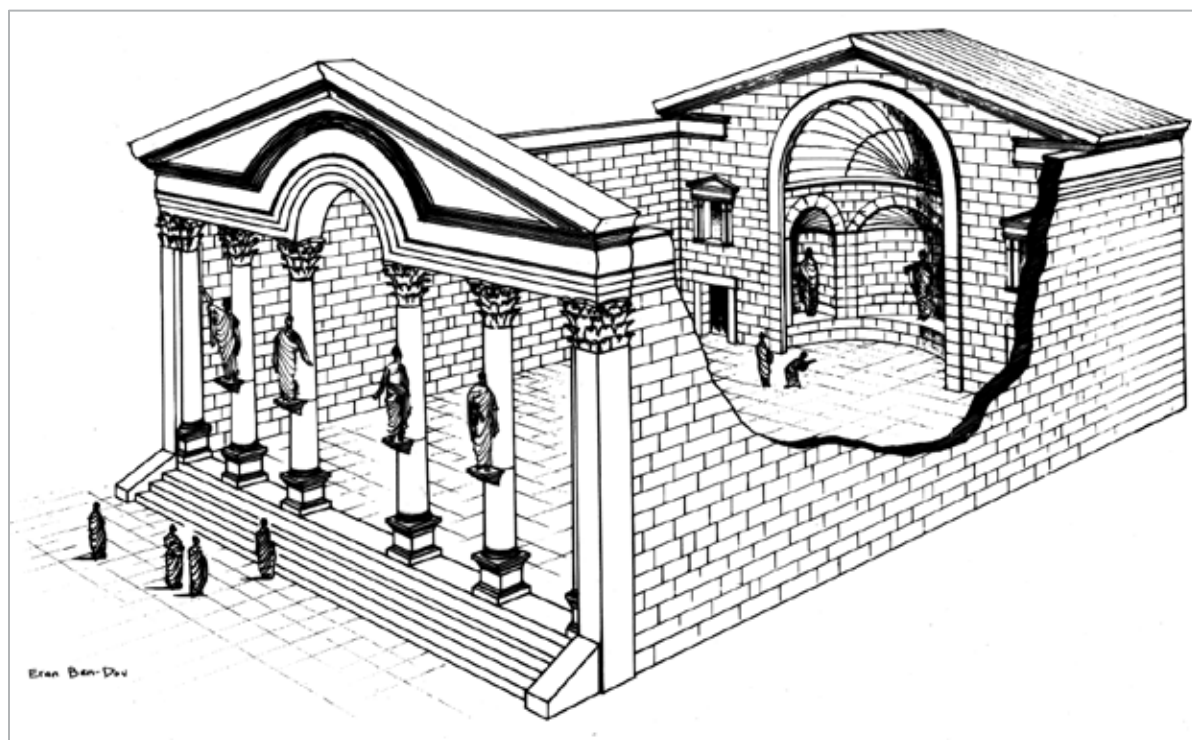


Figure 15. Kanawat, Temple C for the Imperial Cult, suggested reconstruction (drawn by Eran Ben-Dov).



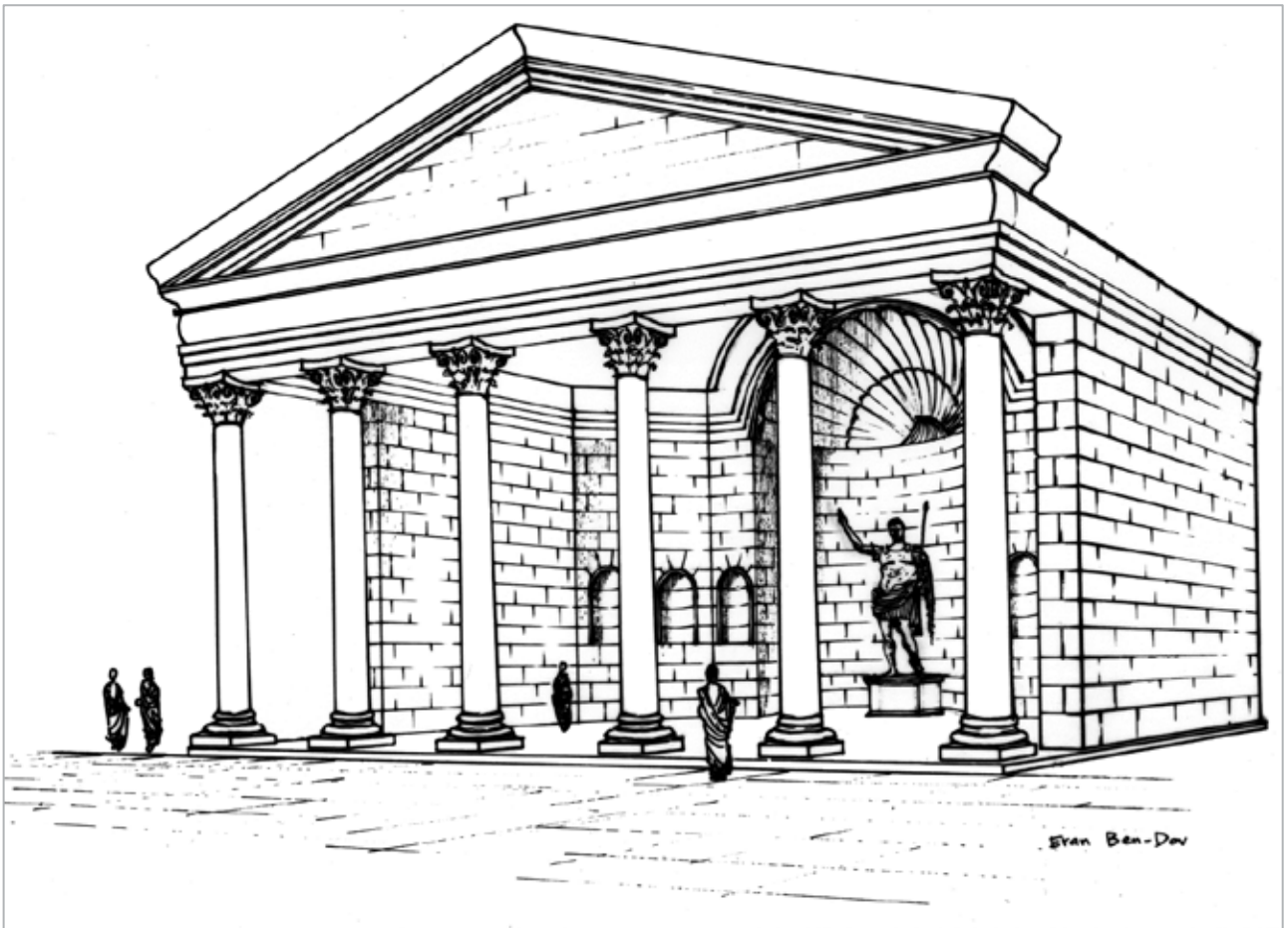


Figure 17. Philippopolis, Hexastyle Temple for the Imperial Cult, suggested reconstruction (drawn by Eran Ben-Dov).

Inserted into the shafts of the four *stoa* columns, at about mid-level height, were corbels intended for mounting statues. The columns of the *porticus* supported an entablature and a Syrian gable. The two long walls of the temple, the eastern and western ones, were smooth. They stood behind the pilasters that enclosed the *stoa* at the entrance front and joined up with the southern wall of the temple, in the middle of which there was a semicircular niche, with a rectangular room on each side of it (see Figure 16). The rooms faced northwards towards the interior space of the temple. Embedded in the circular wall of the large niche in the southern wall of the temple were three small round niches ranged symmetrically. The interior space of the temple, extending from the southern wall with its semicircular niche and side rooms to the *porticus* at the entrance front and the two long walls, was roofless (see Figure 16).

Whoever enters the temple through the *stoa* crowned with a Syrian gable finds himself standing in a rectangular plaza that extends in front of a wall rising to a height of two storeys, in the centre of which is a semicircular niche roofed with a half dome and containing the statue of the emperor.

### Philippopolis

Philippopolis, today a town called *Shahba/Shuhba* in the southern part of the Trachon, was built by the emperor Philip the Arab (ruled: AD 244–249) (Segal 1997: 13–15,

55–57, figs 55–57). The construction of the city was never completed, but enough of it was built so as to testify that it was designed to be a city of large proportions and containing monumental public buildings. Among the structures that were erected when it was founded are two cultic buildings, the Hexastyle Temple and the Open Exedra-Like Temple.

### Hexastyle Temple for the Imperial Cult

The temple was erected in the heart of the city, not far from the forum. At the entrance front of the temple stood six columns, with the end columns placed opposite the ends of the side walls, which means that its plan was *hexastylos-prostylos* (Figure 17) (Segal 2013: 188–189, figs 186–188). The side walls were connected with the two oblique walls on either side of the central niche of the temple. This niche was presumably crowned with a half dome. Smaller niches were carved into the oblique walls on each side of the central niche, three on each side of it, and ranged symmetrically. Two straight walls, one on each side, joined up with the oblique walls and enclosed the plaza which extended opposite the central niche. The plaza could be entered through a *porticus* of six columns (see Figure 17). It is reasonable to suppose that the plaza was not roofed.



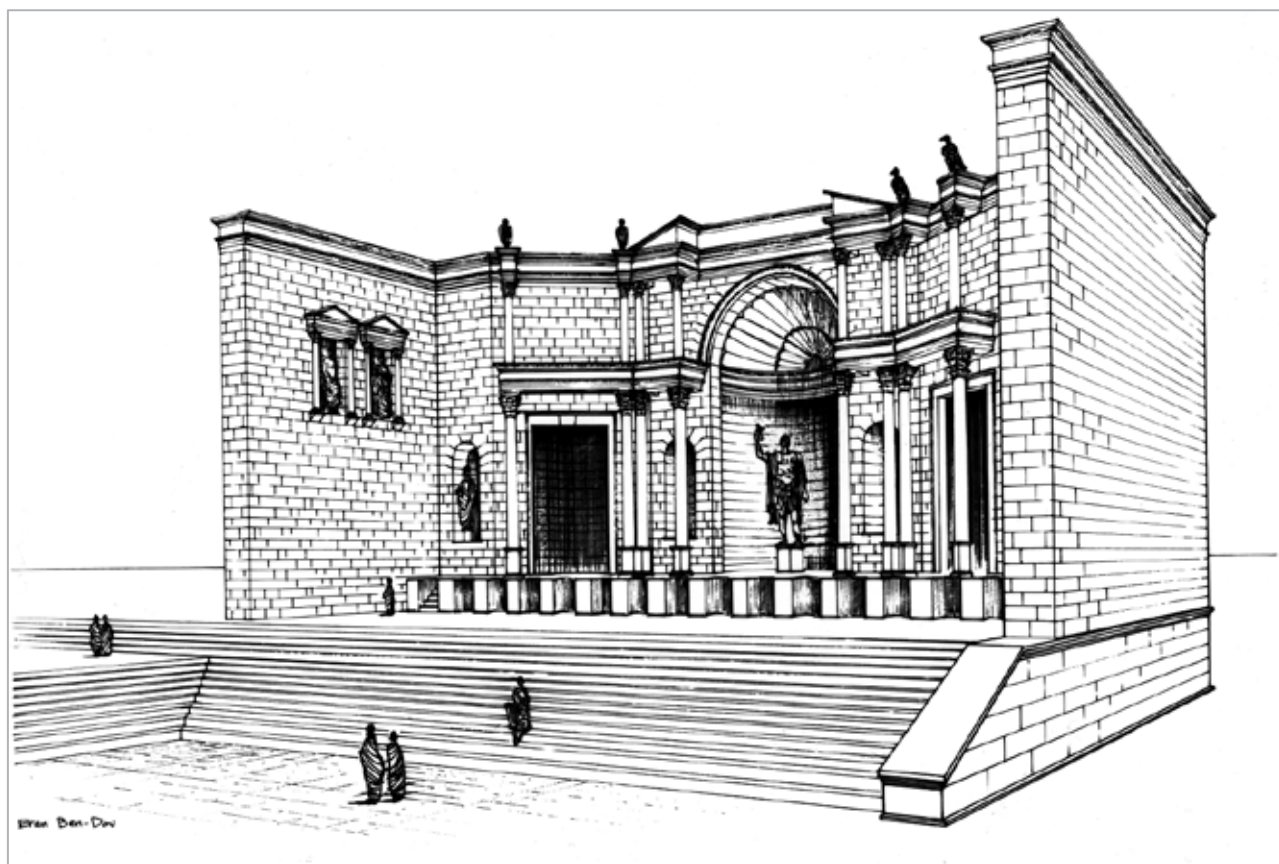


Figure 18. Philippopolis, Open Exedra-like Temple for the Imperial Cult, suggested reconstruction (drawn by Eran Ben-Dov).

### Open Exedra-Like Temple for the Imperial Cult

In the centre of Philippopolis, near the forum, stood an open structure, 30 m in length, which apparently constituted part of the large-sized building complex that may have been used as a palace. This open cultic structure, which is well preserved, has an exedra-type form, with a semicircular niche in its center (Figure 18) (Segal 2013: 189–190, figs 189–191). Standing on each side of the oblique walls and continuous with them, are straight parallel walls enclosing a rectangular plaza in front of the structure. The diameter of the central semicircular niche, which was roofed with a half dome, is 6m. In the centre of each of the oblique walls there were large rectangular doorways that led to rooms, one on each side. Smaller decorated niches in the walls on each side of the central niche were also semicircular in shape. Columns standing parallel with the front of the structure which rose to a height of two stories were also arranged in double stories (see Figure 18).

Parallel with the front of the structure, at a distance of a few meters from it, stood a low wall and semicircular niches alternating with rectangular ones were carved into its front side. The design of this wall resembles the *proscenium* wall that separates the area of the *orchestra* from the stage (*pulpitum*) in Roman theatres.

Leading up to the plaza of the open cultic structure was a stairway as wide as its entire frontage in order to enable

easy access from the level of the forum to the level of the temple.

### Bosra/Bostra

#### Open Exedra-Like Temple for the Imperial Cult

Bosra, which lies on the southwestern slopes of the Hauran, became the capital of *Provincia Arabia* at the beginning of the 2nd century AD and the permanent base camp of *Legio III Cyrenaica*. Most of the public buildings in it were erected during the course of the 2nd and 3rd century AD (Segal 1997: 22–27, figs. 18–25).

The open cultic structure stands at the junction of the two main colonnaded streets in the city. It has an exedra-like plan, with a central semicircular niche roofed by a half dome (Figure 19) (Segal 2013: 219–221, figs 242–250). Extending on either side of it are oblique walls, with pilasters set into them further along the walls. The similarity between the open cultic structure in Bosra and the one in Philippopolis is clearly visible (compare Figures 18 and 19). The only significant difference between the two is that the open front of the structure in Bosra (24.60m in length, nearly the same as the one in Philippopolis) was not enclosed by two short walls but by two columns that were placed opposite and close to the pilasters that bordered the front of the structure, one on each side (see Figure 19). The front of the open exedra-like temple in Bosra rose to a height of three stories and was decorated with rectangular arched niches ranged symmetrically on

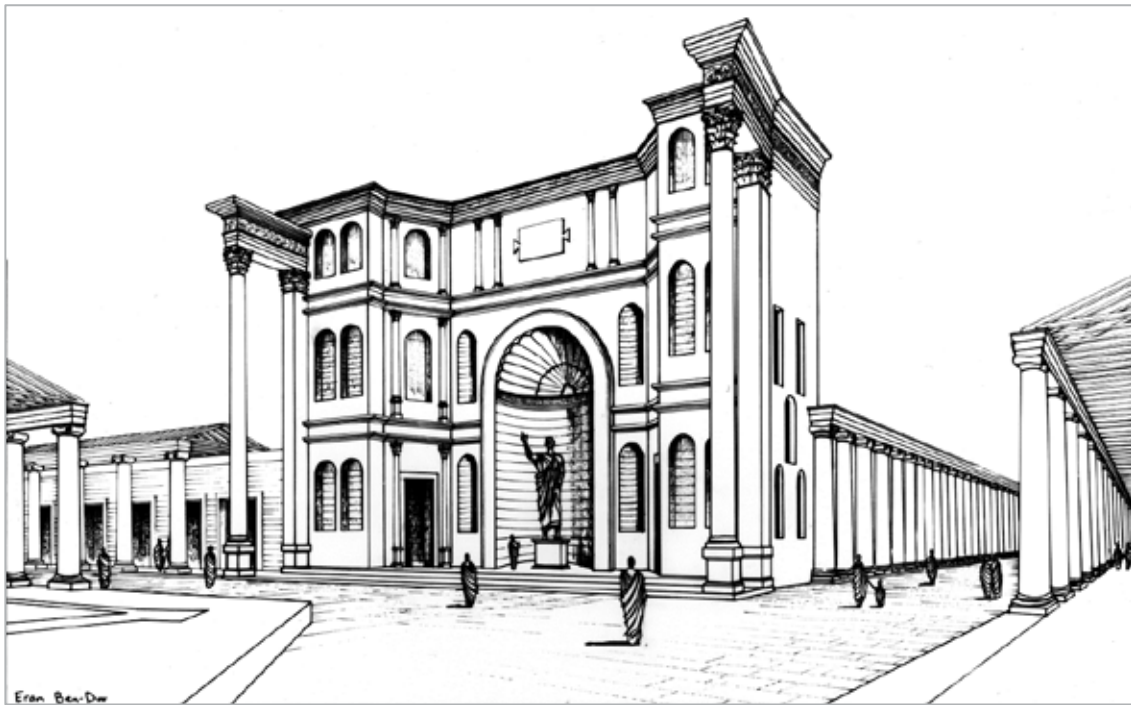


Figure 19. Bosra, Open Exedra-like Temple for the Imperial Cult, suggested reconstruction (drawn by Eran Ben-Dov).

either side of the central semicircular niche in which a statue of the emperor was placed.

### Discussion

The twenty-one temples for the imperial cult that were dealt with in this article were built both in Italy and in the western and eastern provinces. The discussion about these temples was mainly architectural and typological, but the geographical-regional aspect has considerable weight, and it is not by chance that the temples under discussion here represent seven different regions extending from the province of *Gallia Narbonensis* in the west to *Provincia Arabia* in the east. The earliest of these temples were dedicated to Julius Caesar and to his adopted son Octavianus Augustus (ruled: 27 BC – AD 14), while that latest among them was erected in honor of the emperor Probus (ruled: AD 276–282).

The temples that were erected in Rome, Italy and the western provinces, such as *Gallia Narbonensis*, were distinctly Roman temples, whatever the degree of Hellenistic influence on their design might have been. We have here Vitruvian temples, that is to say temples in which the plan, design and decoration can be described and analyzed according to the standards and repertoire of forms that appear in the book of Vitruvius, *De Architectura* (Gordon-Smith 2003; McEwen 2003; Segal 2008: 97). These temples may also be defined as classical temples, i.e., temples that derive their design from Greek-Hellenistic or Etruscan-Roman building traditions.

Whoever examines the plans and designs of the temples for the imperial cult erected in Rome, Italy and the western provinces of the Roman Empire will immediately discern that there is no essential difference between them and the temples that were built for the gods, whether Greek or

Roman. In other words, a temple dedicated to the imperial cult is not reflected in any particular aspect or architectural characteristic of it which might differentiate between it and a temple in honor of the gods.

The imperial cult in the provinces, in which the population was Greek for the most part, had an essentially different character from the one practiced in Italy and the western provinces. The Roman emperors were actually accepted into the pantheon of Greek gods and heroes without any difficulty. Moreover, in Greece and in Asia Minor, other structures also intended for the imperial cult were erected alongside the temples. One of them was the *nymphaeum*, which was built in Olympia, the most important site in the Pan-Hellenic cult, in honor of the emperor Marcus Aurelius. Of a similar character is the *nymphaeum* that was built in the centre of Ephesus in honor of Artemis, the patron goddess of the city, and in honor of the emperor Trajan. The *nymphaeum* in Ephesus, which can be defined as a distinctive decorative structure, a kind of street furniture to enhance the urban landscape, combines its basic function with the imperial cult (Segal 1997: 151–168, figs 184–207). The cult of the emperor is performed in the same structure alongside the cult of Artemis. The borderline between a mortal, the emperor Trajan in this instance, and Artemis, the patron goddess of the city, is completely blurred.

The Marble Halls/Courts that were given various names by architecture researchers, such as Imperial Hall or Kaisersaal, were a phenomenon that was unknown outside Asia Minor. These halls, which were well noted for their overflow of architectural decorations, were erected in the centre of large building complexes that combined an imperial Roman bathhouse with a Hellenistic gymnasium. The imperial cult merged ‘naturally’, if it can be so

defined, with the traditional cults of Hermes and Heracles who were gods and heroes, under whose patronage sport activities were conducted.

The *Sebasteion* in Aphrodisias, dedicated to the emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty (from Augustus to Nero), is a fascinating sanctuary which is unequalled in the Graeco-Roman world. This sanctuary faithfully reflects the essential world outlook of the urban nobility in Greece and in Asia Minor who held the view that Rome should not be regarded as a conqueror but as a beneficial and enlightened regime existing under the patronage of the gods. This implies that the Roman emperors were merely a link in the chain of gods and heroes that populated the Greek pantheon.

The *Sebasteion*, as a sanctuary, derived its inspiration from Hellenistic architecture, yet the very use of a distinctive Hellenistic structure such as the *stoa* and its transformation into an architectural platform to support hundreds of reliefs to transmit a political and religious message to sanctuary visitors, is indeed a unique and extraordinary solution, the roots of which should apparently be sought in the East itself.

The *Augusteum* erected by Herod, King of Iudaea in honor of the emperor Augustus in Samaria/Sebaste, is a distinctive Roman temple situated within a symmetrical, axial and frontal sanctuary that can only recall Roman sanctuaries typical of the end of the Republican period and the period of the Principate. Although Iudaea belongs geographically to the Hellenistic-Roman East, Herod wanted to erect a purely Roman temple in honor of his patron Augustus. The very construction of this temple in the Kingdom of Iudaea faithfully reflects the world outlook of Herod who desired to integrate Iudaea within the new world order that was gradually being formed in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean under the patronage of Rome.

The seven temples for the imperial cult that were erected in the northern part of *Provincia Arabia* during the 2nd and 3rd centuries are, in my view, particularly fascinating structures and essentially quite different from the temples for the imperial cult in other regions of the Roman Empire. The population of *Provincia Arabia* was mainly Semitic, and the degree of its exposure to Greek and Roman culture was not uniform. The inhabitants of the cities in the Decapolis area were deeply influenced by classical culture even before the founding of this province in the year AD 106. Such was not the case in the smaller cities and villages in the region of the basalt lands, i.e., in the Hauran and the Trachon. In these regions in particular, far from the large Hellenized cities, local traditions flourished and found their expression in the field of construction. Yet it is clearly evident that the builders in the basalt lands were familiar with the classical repertoire of architectural forms.

What is characteristic of the seven temples for the imperial cult is their plan and design that herald something new and even revolutionary. Before clarifying what was revolutionary about it, one should recall that in the cult of

Greek and Roman gods the temple was isolated from its nearby surroundings and placed within a sanctuary (*temenos*). The temple itself was perceived as the house of the god, and therefore the worshippers could not enter it but only watch the sacrificial ceremonies while standing outside the temple, usually in the plaza that extended between the main front of the temple and the altar.

None of the seven temples for the imperial cult erected in basalt lands were situated within a sanctuary. These temples were usually built with their entrance fronts facing a public square or street. Moreover, the interior space of a Greek or Roman temple was usually divided into a *pronaos* (entry hall), a *naos/cella* (main hall) and an *adyton* (holy of holies) where the statue of the god usually stood. The interior space in each of the seven temples under discussion here were totally different. A study, even a superficial one, of the plans of these temples shows clearly that they lack a *pronaos*, and that instead of a *naos*, the worshippers gathered in an open-air plaza in front of the *adyton* and turned their faces towards it. The *adyton* is usually designed as a roofed hall, a kind of exedra, in which the statue of the emperor is placed, or it is designed as a broad frontage enclosed on both sides by short walls in the centre of which is a semicircular niche roofed with a half dome intended for the placement of the emperor's statue. Structures of this kind closely resembled the *nymphaeum* or the *scaenae frons* in Roman theatres rather than classical temples. From an architectural point of view, the temples of the basalt lands may be defined as non-Vitruvian temples. We have here temples in which their main characteristic is in being open temples. This is primarily expressed by the absence of a sanctuary compound (*temenos*) which detaches the temple from its surroundings. Even more important is that instead of a *naos* there is an open-air plaza extending in front of the *adyton* in which the worshippers can gather and stand facing the statue of the emperor. This is in fact a nullification of the basic conception of a pagan worship which regards the temple as the house of the god. The temples for the imperial cult that were erected in *Provincia Arabia* offered a solution through their plans and designs and responded to the need for a new and more intimate form of worship by inviting the worshipper to approach the statue of the emperor.

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# The Ascent to the Temple Platform in Caesarea from the Harbor Side<sup>1</sup>

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*The Temple of Rome and Augustus in Caesarea was erected on top of a raised platform retained on the west by barrel vaults. During the years changes took place in the dates assigned to these vaults by archaeologists. At present, following more recent excavations conducted by the Israel Antiquities Authority, it is agreed by all that the vaults are Herodian. It was also found that the number of vaults was fourteen: four on the north, four on the south, and in between six narrower vaults. A large ashlar pier 20 x 10m in dimensions, perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the vaults and the Temple, is still extant on the edge of the Inner Harbor quay, c. 10m away from the inner vaults. Three stairs, leading up from east to west, were exposed above its central part.*

*So far, scholars had suggested that the ascent to the temple platform was by means of a bridge that had started from this pier, but these proposals are not in accord with the archaeological finds. The proposal presented here is that the ascent was by means of a three-stories double Stair-Tower that resembles the Large Altar (or Observatory Tower) in the courtyard of the Temple of Jupiter in Baalbek (Heliopolis) in Lebanon.*

KEYWORDS: CAESAREA MARITIMA; STAIR-TOWER; TEMPLE.

As is well known, the Temple of Rome and Augustus in Caesarea was erected on a raised platform retained by barrel vaults, which was preserved to a maximum elevation of c. 12m above sea level. During the years, changes took place in the dates assigned to these vaults by archaeologists. Avraham Negev, who excavated the southernmost vault – Vault No. 1 – attributed them to the Herodian period (Negev 1961: 81–83; 1963: 728; 1967: 24). Avner Raban first believed that the wall that delimited the vaults on the east was a section of the wall of the Straton's Tower, leaving the Acropolis Hill outside the city wall (Raban 1987: 85, fig. 21).<sup>2</sup> Yosef Porath, who returned and dug in this vault as well as the vault adjacent to it to the north – Vault No. 2, and in other vaults further north, determined that the vaults were all erected in about 300 AD, and that in Herodian times a vast open plaza extended at the foot of the temple platform and to the east of the Inner Harbor quay, measuring 80 x 23m and elevated c. 1m above the quay level. The plaza was bounded on south and north by two wings of the Temple Platform, 21m long, and on the east - by a tall wall, and the later vaults, 10–12 in number, were later built on top of it (Figures 1, 2; Porath 1996: 107–9; 1998: 45–48, fig. 10).<sup>3</sup> Excavations conducted by Peter Gendelman in 2008 uncovered new finds that completely altered the picture. At first it turned out that shorter and narrower vaults were built in the central section. Later, in the excavations co-directed by him, Muhammad Hatter and Uzi 'Ad, it turned out with certainty that the vaults were all Herodian.<sup>4</sup> Hence, there was no open plaza east of the quay and at the foot of the Temple Platform. The array of vaults was different than

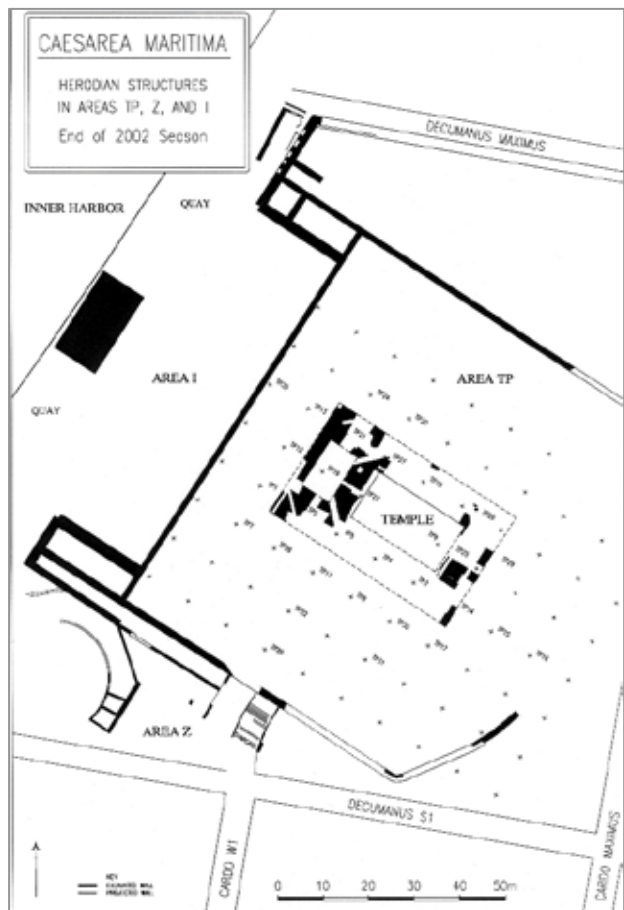


Figure 1. The lower plaza at the foot of the Temple Platform according to Yosef Porath; Plan (Holum 1999: 19, Fig. 4 [A. Iamim]).

<sup>1</sup> A Hebrew version of this article is to be published elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> Later Raban presented two other different courses for Straton's Tower wall. For references see: Patrich 2011: 10, note 20.

<sup>3</sup> Following Porath I had also described this-way the area extending to the east of the quay of the Inner Harbor.

<sup>4</sup> No report was so far published about the 2008 excavations. As for the later excavations, only brief notes with few photos were so far publish in the interim IAA weekly reports (*Shotef*) of the years 2017–2019. See, for example, *Shotef* 1218, *Shotef* 1819. The fact that they are Herodian was also mentioned to me by the excavators during several excursions with them in the vaults, and I am grateful to them.

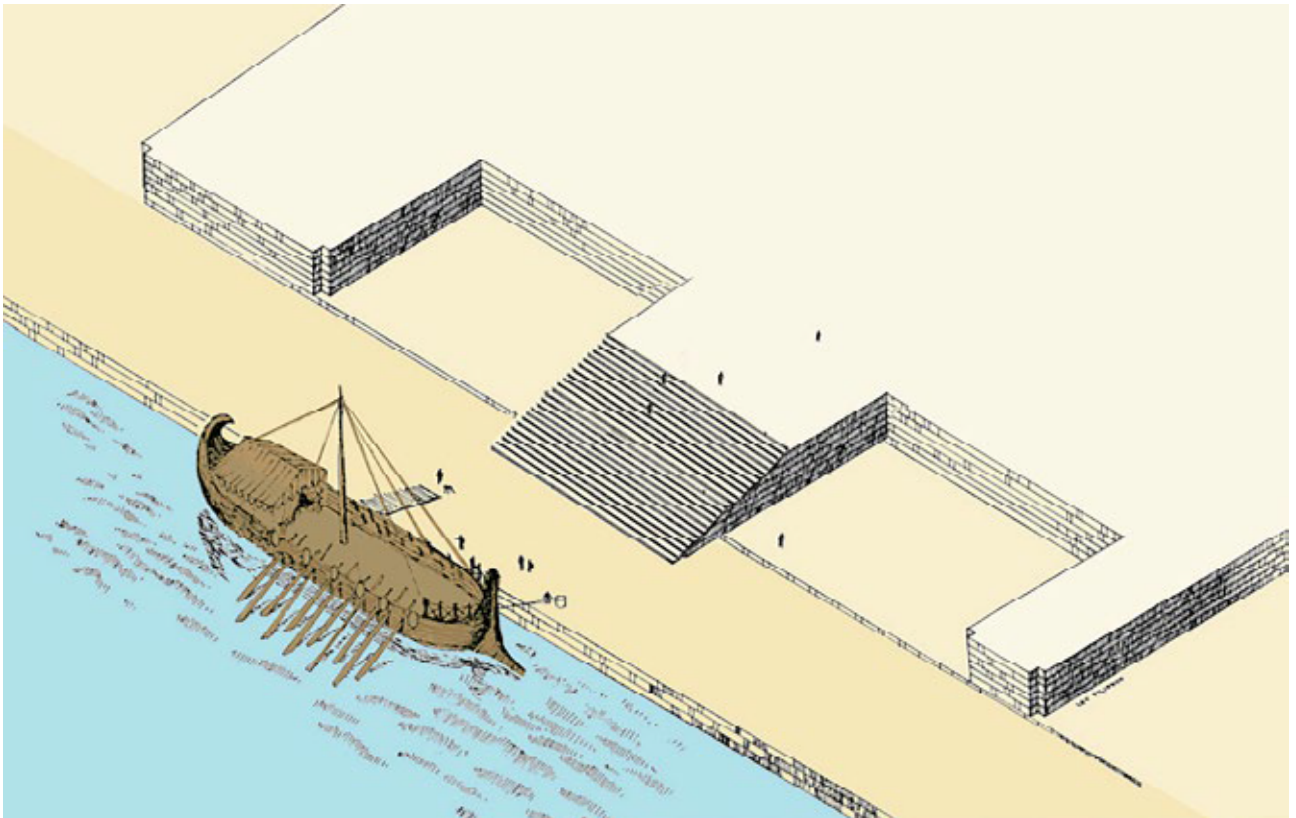


Figure 2. The lower plaza at the foot of the Temple Platform according to Yosef Porath; Reconstruction (Porath 1998: 46, Fig. 10).



Figure 3a. The monumental pier. The north-west corner (Photo: the author).

what was initially thought: not 10-12 vaults of the same dimensions, but 4 in the south (marked in digits 1-4), 4 in the north (marked in letters A-D), and 6, shorter and narrower, in the center (marked with the Greek letters  $\alpha$  -  $\zeta$ ). This new array was already published by Holum (2014: 95, Fig. 6).

How did they ascent up to the temple platform from the harbor side? Opposite the four inner of the six narrow vaults (vaults  $\beta$ - $\epsilon$ ), to their full width and c. 10m away, there is the first course of a large ashlar pier built on the inner harbor quay, perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the vaults and the Temple (Figures 3a, 3b, 4a, 4b). It is clear to all that this pier was the starting point of the ascent. Its length is 20m (c. 40 cubits) on the north-south axis and



Figure 3b. The monumental pier. The south-east corner (Photo: the author).

c. 10m (c. 20 cubits) wide. Its location, near the edge of the quay, and the height of the course, indicate that the ascent did not start neither from west to east, nor from the north or the south. It was rather from east to west. And indeed, in the central part of its eastern side traces of the beginning of a staircase that climbed westward in its thickness was uncovered. Three steps 2m wide and ascending west (marked 1, 2, 3 on Figure 4a) were partially exposed by the Raban expedition. Accordingly, Raban (Figures 5a-5c; Raban 2004: 14; 2009: 148-150, Figs. 5.94, 5.104, 5.106 - 5.109), as well as Ehud Netzer (2006: 104, fig. 23) and Holum (*infra*), (Figures 6a, 6b), set the start of the ascent as a staircase climbing from east to west. According to Raban's proposal, this wide staircase was roofed by a vault and led to a kind of open balcony, or an





Figure 4a. The monumental pier and remains in its vicinity; Plan (courtesy Anna Iamim, *The Combined Caesarea Excavations*).

observation deck, overlooking the inner harbor. From there, two staircases split - on the south and north sides of the pier, which led up to a second horizontal tread on the

east. From there a single staircase was leading farther east, supported on two arches and leading to the Temple Platform. However, the western arch of the two cannot be recognized in the existing remains, while the eastern one is not from the Herodian phase, but from the Byzantine.<sup>5</sup> It retained a later staircase that led to the Octagonal Church that came in place of the temple (*infra*). This is clearly evident at the eastern end of this arch. The arch stones visible *in situ* (Figure 7) are not anchored at the top of vaults  $\beta$ - $\epsilon$ , but are sunk into their western wall, a wall that is not particularly thick. The pace of the stairs also does not match the width of the proposed bearing arches and the thickness of their piers. The width of the pier that supposedly carried the eastern arch (on a north-south axis) is the width of the Byzantine staircase, not the width of the monumental pier at the edge of the quay. Netzer offered a stair bridge with a total width of 10m (while the width of the monumental pier is 20m), which is retained by 4 arches, while Holum made two proposals: The first (Figure 6a), probably a draft - is a continuous staircase similar to the Byzantine ascent, but in the width of the monumental pier, on top of which he places the altar (Holum 2015: 54\*, Fig. 3; 2020: 331, Fig. 11.8). A staircase that climbs from east to west at the beginning of the ascent is not depicted in the illustration. Thus, this proposal has no basis. The second (Figure 6b), is similar to Raban's above proposal, except that the staircase that ascends to the roof of the narrow arches is only 10m wide and not 20m. At the start of the ascent, he also placed two, presumed, short staircases leading from the south-west and north-west corners of the monumental pier to the observation deck to which the lower staircase reaches as well, from the east.

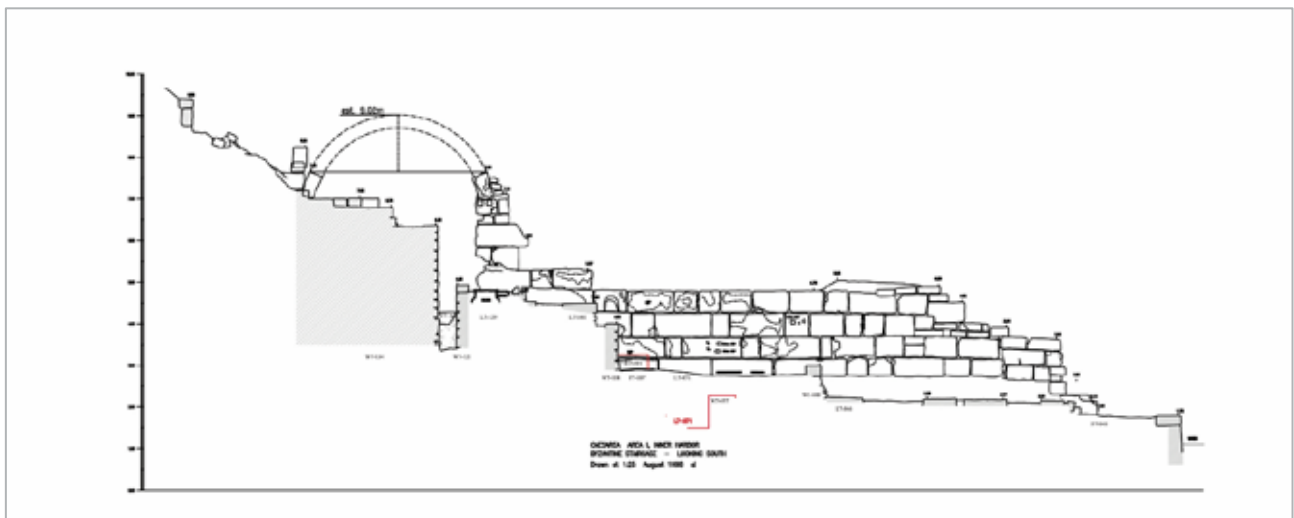


Figure 4b. The monumental pier and remains in its vicinity; Cross-section, looking south toward the Byzantine staircase (Raban 2009: 148, Fig. 5.107; Holum 2020: 342, Fig. 11.15).

<sup>5</sup> For these remains see: Holum 2020: 328–331, 336, Figs. 11.5, 11.7, 11.10; The addressed walls are W8.522 – W7.476 (2.33m a.s.l. in elevation), attributed to the intermediate pier of the supposed bridge, and W7.163 and W7.164 (4.02 and 4.66m in elevation), attributed to the support of the assumed eastern vault. (W7.137 is a residue of a wall built atop W8.522. It carried the vault of the Byzantine staircase that ascended to the octagonal church). Floor F8.515 (2.19m in elevation) is placed in the text under the western vault of the Herodian bridge, but in the plan (Fig. 11.5), it is depicted on pier W8.522 that retained both vaults. The two other walls (W7.163 and W7.164) seem to be

incorporated in the façade of the smaller vaults. The authors – Y.D. Arnon and K.G. Holum, are indecisive if the Herodian stairs ran indeed over vaults: 'Indeed, the team discovered slight evidence for transverse vaults beneath the Herodian staircase that may be subject to confirmation in later excavations' (p. 331). It can be added that in the plan (Fig. 11.5), the hypothetical narrow intermediate pier that presumably had carried the two vaults is of the same length as the monumental pier (c. 20m), while the staircase leading up depicted in the reconstruction (Fig. 11.8), is much narrower. W8.522 might have served as a vertical support for the wooden bridge, midway of its span.

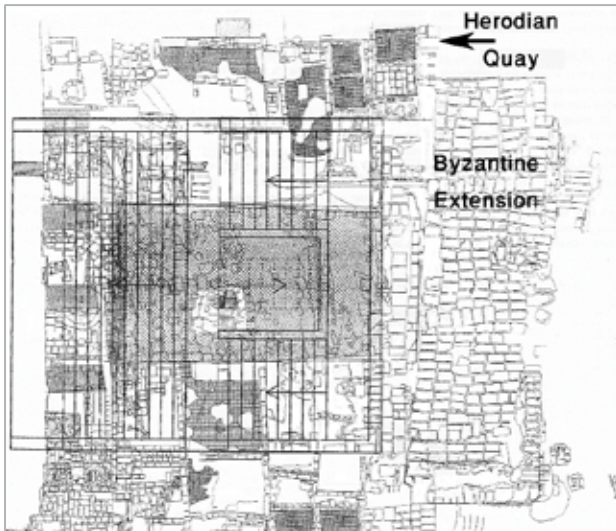


Figure 5a. Plan of the stair bridge according to Raban (Raban 2009: 149, Fig. 5.108).

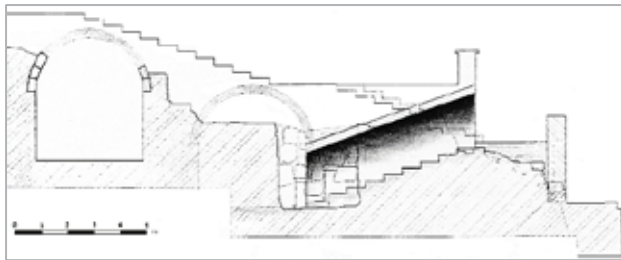


Figure 5b. Restoration of the stair bridge according to Raban; West-east cross-section, looking south (Raban 2009: 150, Fig. 5.109).

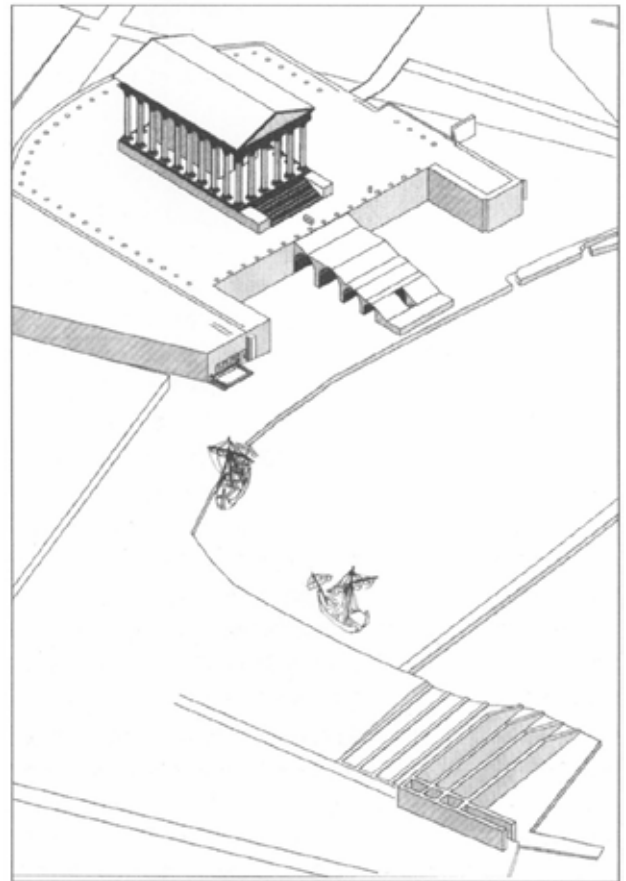
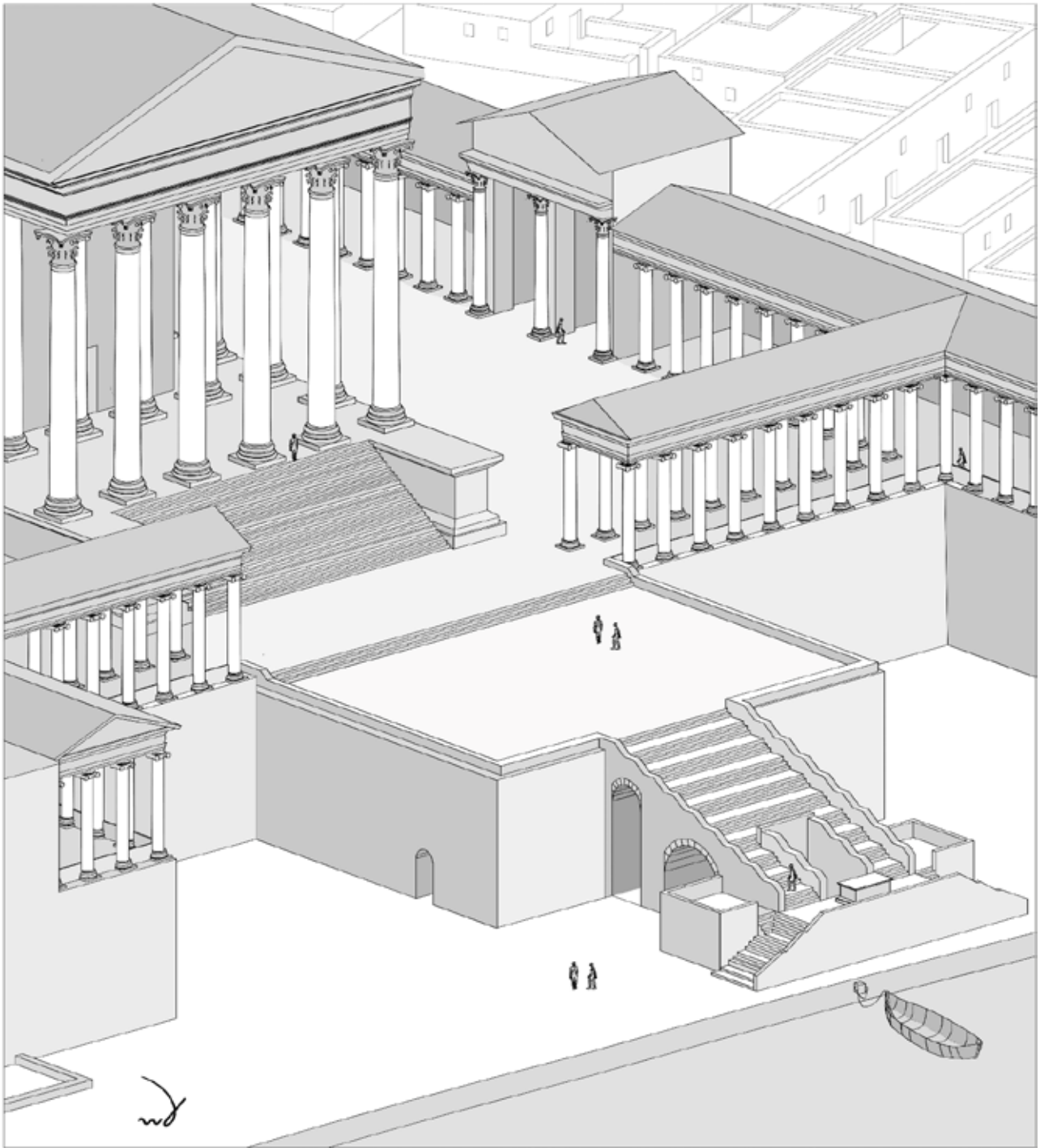


Figure 5c. Restoration of the stair bridge according to Raban; Reconstruction with the staircase set over four north-south vaults (Raban: 2004: 14 [illustration]).



Figure 6a. Restoration of the ascent according to the Holum (drawings: Anna Iamim); As a continuous staircase (Holum 2020, frontispiece).





*Figure 6b. Restoration of the ascent according to the Holum (drawings: Anna Iamim); As a split staircase ascending to the roof of the narrow vaults (Holum 2015: 55\*, Fig. 5; 2020: 331, Fig. 11.8). Note that the restoration presents the stage in the research in which only the narrow vaults were considered Herodian.*

Face Raban, he does not set a diagonal vault above the lowest stairs but leaves this area open to the sky (Holum 2015: 55\*, Fig. 5; 2020: 331, Fig. 11.8). Either way, according to their understanding the ascent was in the shape of a graded bridge carried on arches. Except the point of departure - the monumental pier, their proposals have no support in the archaeological finds.

So how did they climb to the Temple Platform from the west during the Herodian period? Already years ago, I suggested that the ascent was in a stair tower and a bridge, but then, following Porath's excavations, the perception

was accepted that the vaults were not Herodian; that at the foot of the Temple Platform, between it and the quay, an open plaza extended (Patrich 2005: 515). I thought there existed a second massive pier, hidden under the late vaults, but no such a pier was uncovered. The proposal presented here (Figures 8a–8f) relates to the updated array of the vaults, following the excavations of Gendelman and his associates. According to this proposal, the ascent was in the shape of a three-story double Stair-Tower, somewhat similar to the Large Altar (or Observatory Tower) in the courtyard of the Temple of Jupiter in Baalbek (Heliopolis) in Lebanon, as restored by Collart and Coupel (1951;





Figure 7. The stones of the eastern arch incorporated in the façade of the small vaults. Note that the height of one of the small vaults rises high above the stones of the arch (Photo: the author).

Harding 1963; Ragette and Wheeler 1980: 34–35), (Figure 9).<sup>6</sup> Stairs were installed in the first two floors of the Stair-Tower proposed here, and the third floor was higher, and on its façade, there were pillars that gave the whole building a sense of splendor.<sup>7</sup> Lighting windows were installed in the exterior walls of the tower, to the south, west and north. The monumental pier preserves the length and width of the double tower. In the first two floors within its central part, two staircases climbed from east to west, each being later split into two staircases to the north and south. The two staircases on the second floor opened onto two treads that led up and east to an open terrace – a colonnaded porch with a façade of four pillars set between two *antae* with half a pillar attached to each.

The interval between the colonnaded porch and the narrow vaults on the opposite side, *c.* 10m wide, was bridged by a

horizontal bridge of thick wooden beams. The western end of each beam was anchored in the stair-tower, while the eastern end was anchored in the front wall of vaults β-ε. In the reconstruction presented here, five main beams are placed on the axis of the walls separating these vaults. One can think of four additional beams in the headstone axis of each of the four vaults and there may have been even more than nine of these main rafters. The approximate length of each such rafter *c.* 11.5m - is a reasonable length. Temples and churches are known, whose main hall, of wooden ceilings, was wider. For example, the approximate inner width of the Temple of Augustus and Rome in Caesarea, to which the ascent at our concern climbed, was 12.69m (Holum 2019: 122);<sup>8</sup> the width of the Temple of Augustus in Samaria was 12.45m (40 feet of 31cm; Reisner, Fisher

<sup>6</sup> The French scholars conceived it as a Tower-Altar and following them also other scholars (Butcher 2003: 354–355, 363–369; Segal 2013: 120–129 and notes 143 and 157 on p. 342. To its west, nearer to the temple's façade, a second Tower-Altar was uncovered. See: Collart, Coupel and Kalayan 1977. The dimensions of the smaller altar were 8.40 x 9.90m, and its assumed height 9m. A single staircase was climbing up to its roof. The dimensions of the larger Tower-Altar 20.26 x 21.14m and its presumed elevation 17m. A double staircase ran to its roof. One, presumably, for climbing up; the second – for going down. The exact date of its erection either in the 1st *c.*, or the 2nd century AD, is not known. Frederick Ragette preferred interpreting it as an observatory tower, although it can not be ruled out that at the same time a libation altar was located on its top. It is unconceivable that there was also an

altar for sacrificing slaughtered animals. A Tower-Altar is perhaps depicted on a city-coin of Tripolis (Butcher 2003: 354, fig. 163).

<sup>7</sup> Fragments of a base and column drums of a large order were uncovered in the core of the byzantine staircase. See: Dalali-Amos 2020: 140–146, cat. #s 1, 7, 8, 10–20. They might have belonged to the said façade, but this cannot be proven.

<sup>8</sup> Holum relies on Edna Amos's chapter on the reconstruction of the temple, published in the Final Report on his excavations (2020: 141–172; the *cella*'s dimensions are given there on p. 136, Fig. 6.6). The data was also published in Dalali-Amos 2013: 62, Fig. 8 (an internal width of 12.70m is given there). According to Netzer's 2006: 105, the internal width of the *cella* was 12.2m.

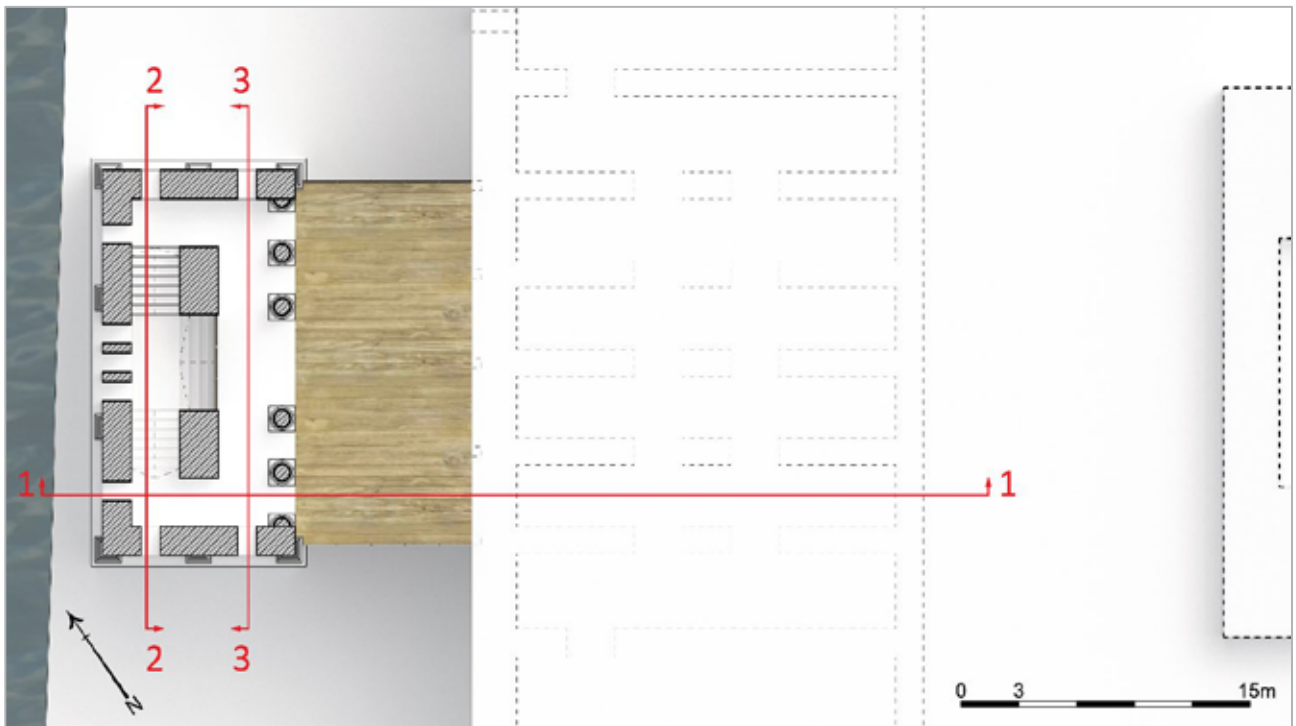


Figure 8a. Reconstruction of the ascent proposed here: a three-story double stair-tower and a wooden bridge (illustrations: Architect Idan Rabinowitz according to the author's instructions). Top view / plan of the third-floor level, with cross-sections marked.

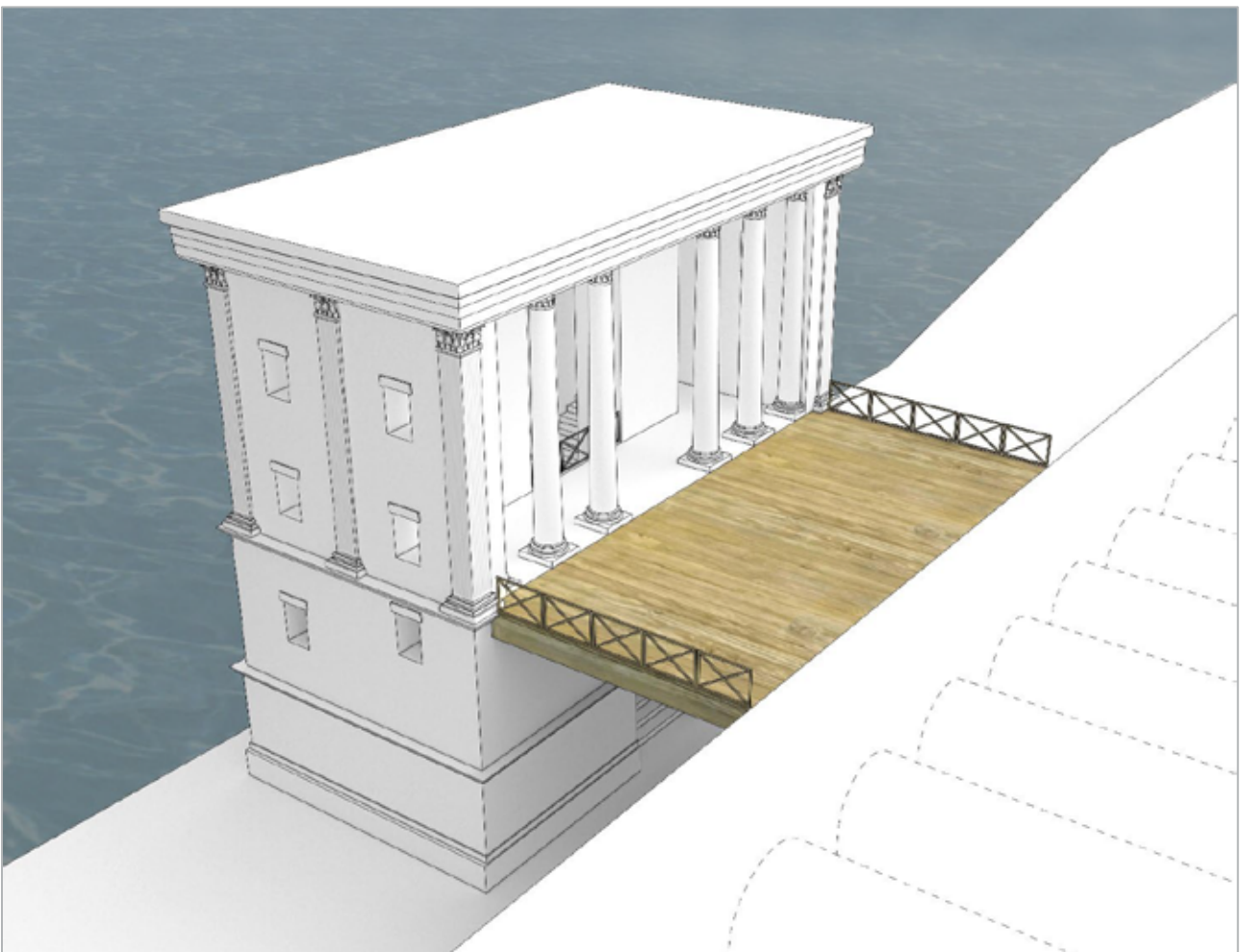
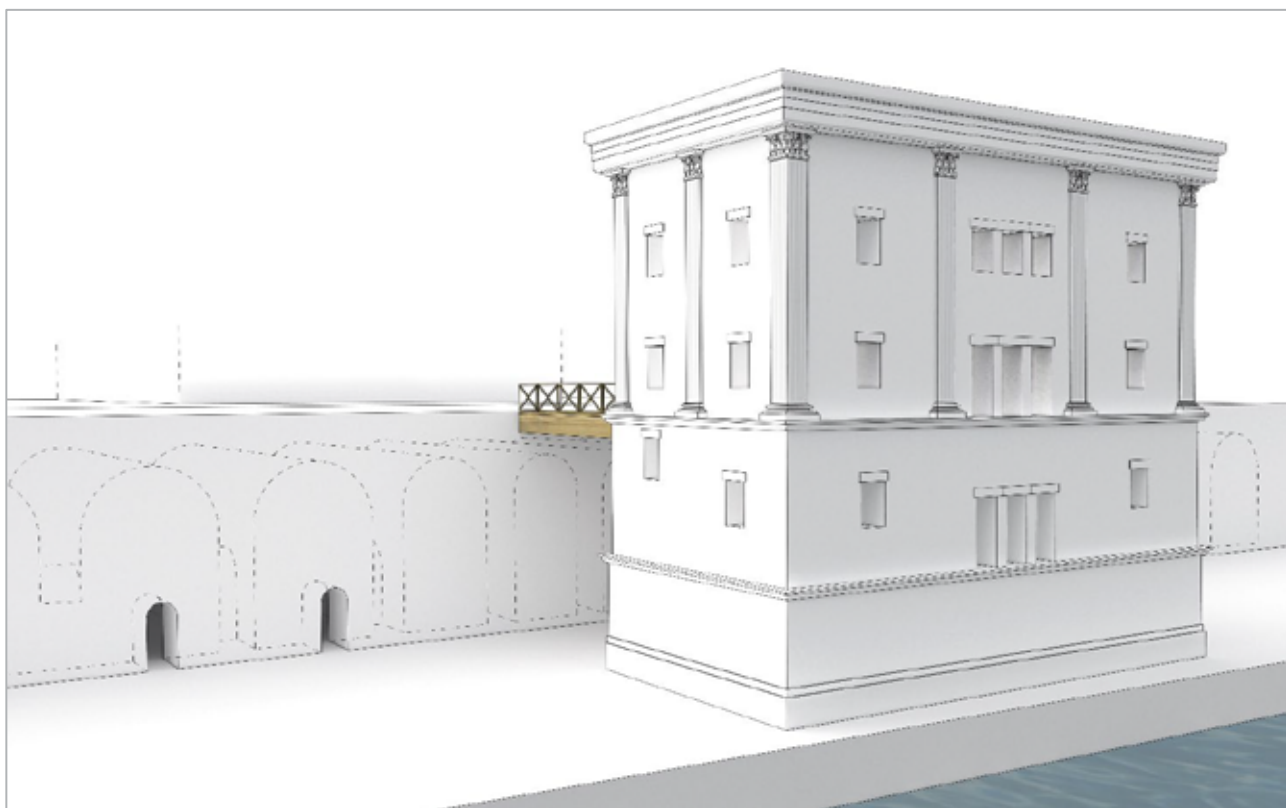
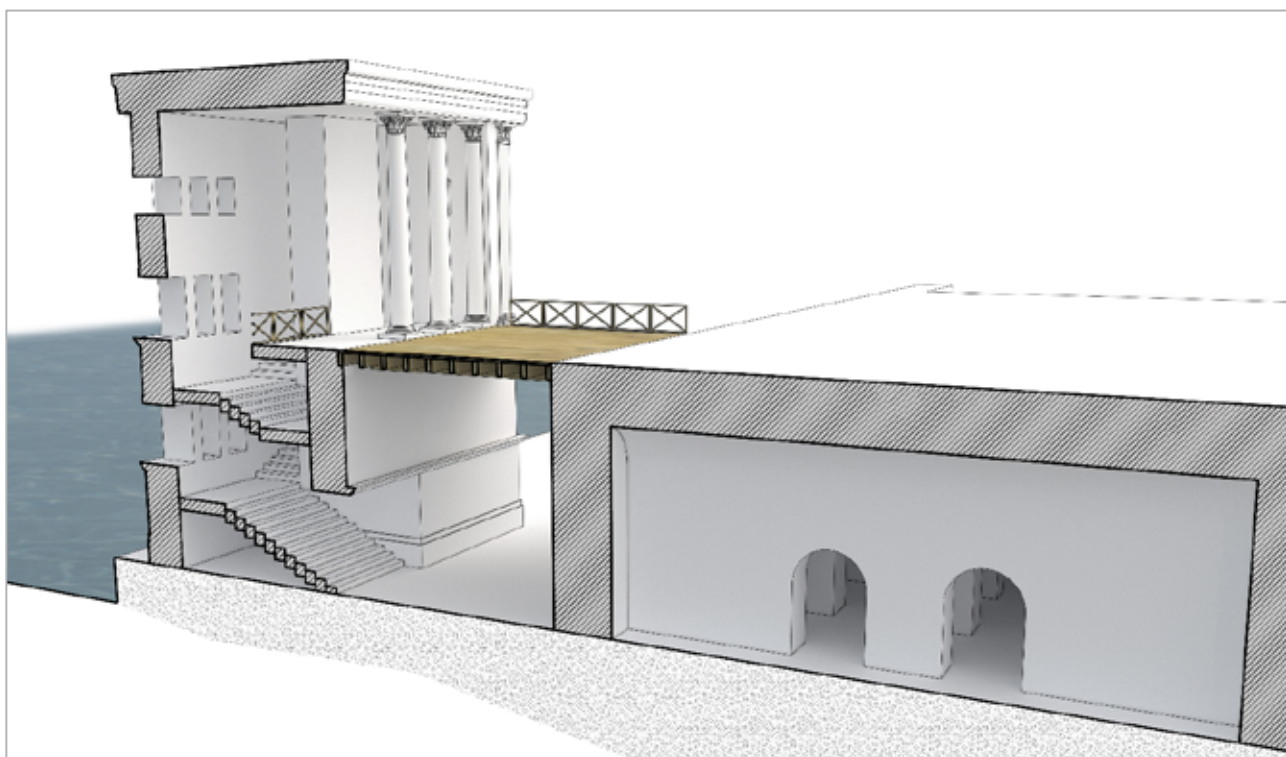


Figure 8b. Reconstruction of the ascent proposed here: a three-story double stair-tower and a wooden bridge (illustrations: Architect Idan Rabinowitz according to the author's instructions). General view from the outside, south-east view.



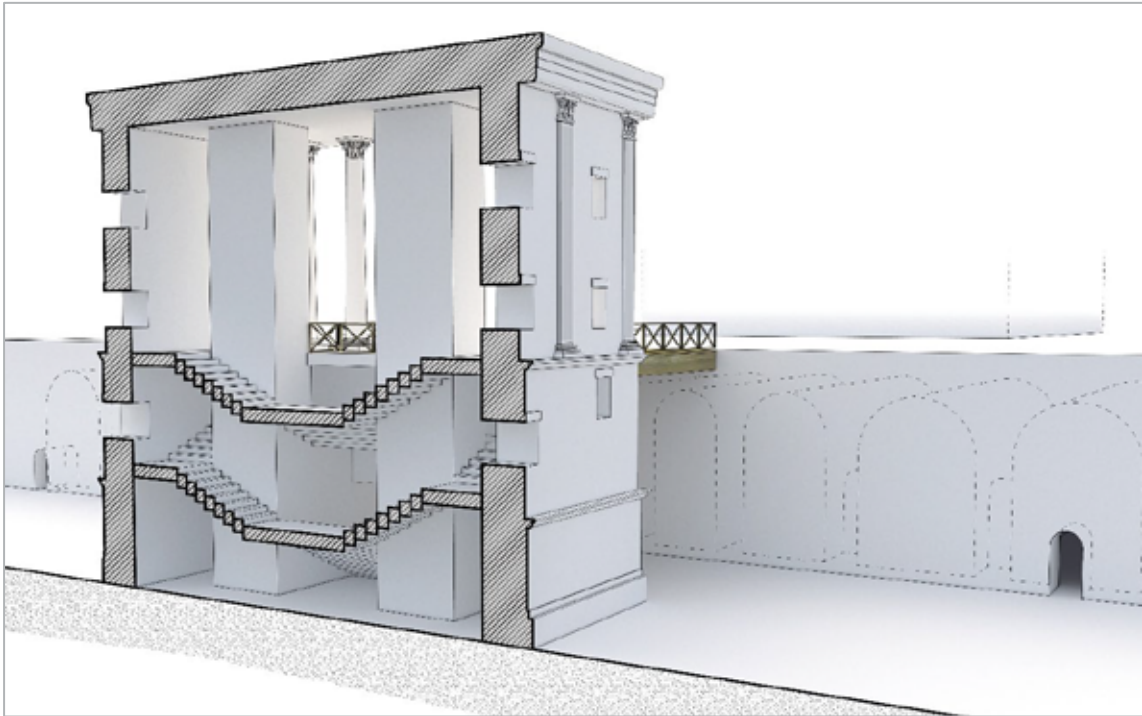


*Figure 8c. Reconstruction of the ascent proposed here: a three-story double stair-tower and a wooden bridge (illustrations: Architect Idan Rabinowitz according to the author's instructions). General view from the outside, view from north-west.*

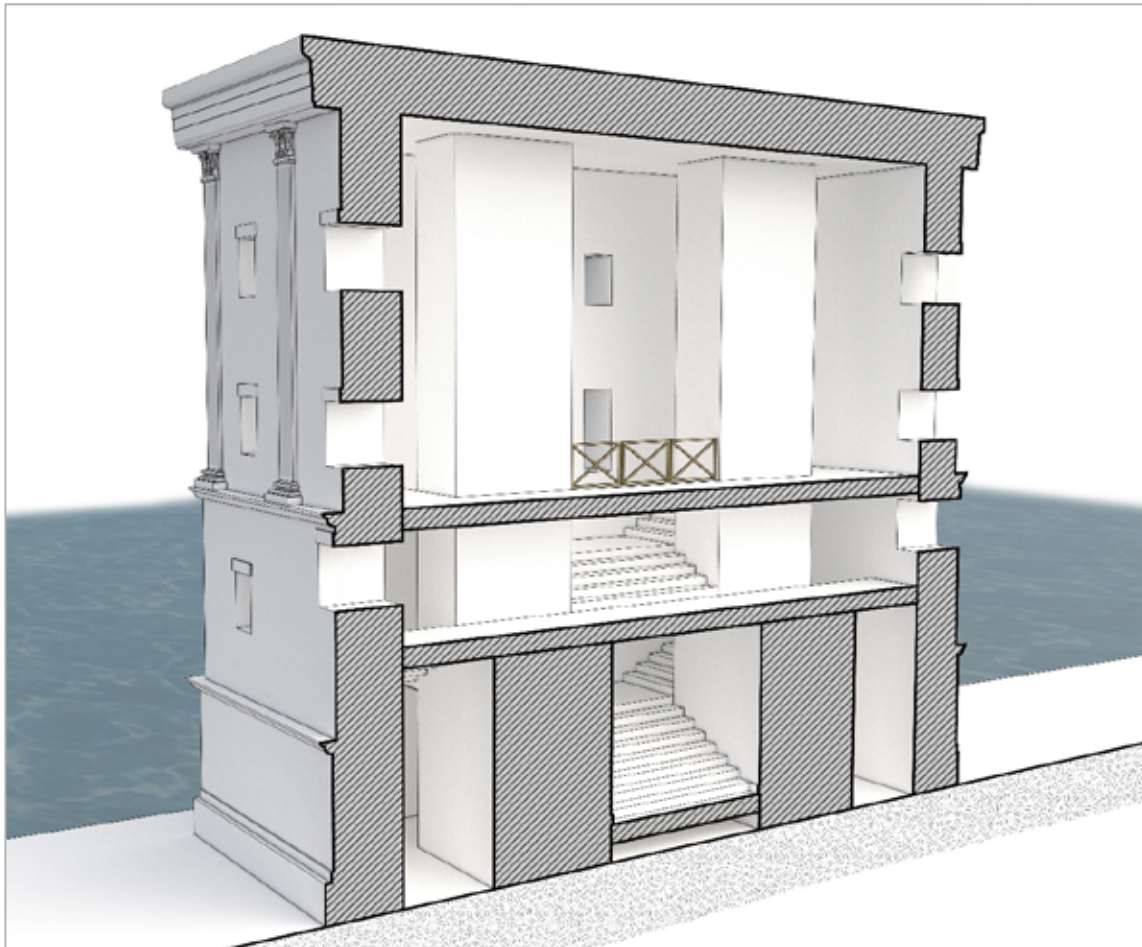


*Figure 8d. Reconstruction of the ascent proposed here: a three-story double stair-tower and a wooden bridge (illustrations: Architect Idan Rabinowitz according to the author's instructions). Cross-section 1-1, view from south-east.*





*Figure 8e. Reconstruction of the ascent proposed here: a three-story double stair-tower and a wooden bridge (illustrations: Architect Idan Rabinowitz according to the author's instructions). Cross-section 2-2, view from the south-west.*



*Figure 8f. Reconstruction of the ascent proposed here: a three-story double stair-tower and a wooden bridge (illustrations: Architect Idan Rabinowitz according to the author's instructions). Cross-section 3-3, view from south-east.*

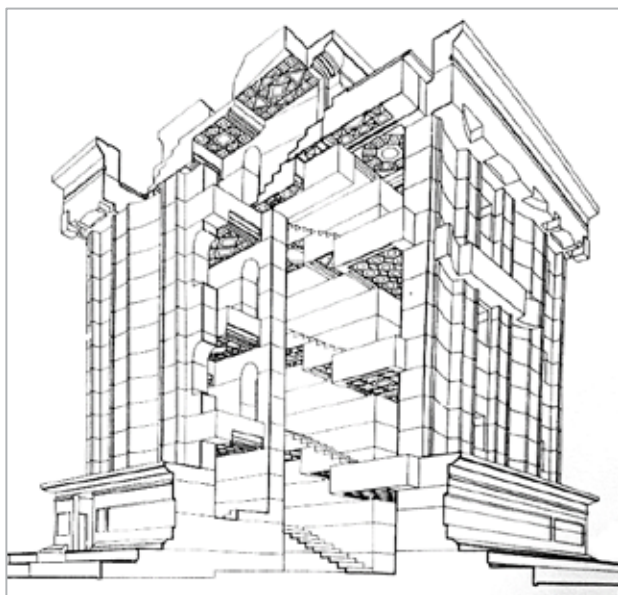


Figure 9. The Altar Tower / Great Observatory tower in Baalbek. Reconstruction (Collart and Coupel 1951, Table LXII).

and Lyon 1924: 177, plan 14; Crowfoot, Kenyon and Sukenik 1942: 123–139);<sup>9</sup> the width of the main hall of the Royal Stoa on the Herodian Temple Mount (according to Flavius Josephus) was 45 feet, equivalent to c. 15m (Peleg-Barkat 2017: 96); the width of the nave of the Constantinian Church of the Holy Sepulcher c. 15m; of the Church of Nativity at Bethlehem 10.4m; and that of Justinian Nea Church in Jerusalem was suggested to be 19.74m (Ovadia 1970, under these churches).<sup>10</sup> Many more examples can be provided. Evidently, bridge beams should be thicker and stronger than ceiling beams. Thickness dimensions of about 25cm and even more and a height of about 50cm are possible, reasonable and known from contemporary buildings.<sup>11</sup> The cedars of Lebanon reach heights of 40m, so that cedar beams could easily bridge the span in question. As for the secondary rafters: in the case of five main beams, the length of the secondary rafters will be 5m. In the reconstruction presented here, 10

such rafters are displayed, above which is a third layer of planks c. 1m long, which are used for the flooring. If there were nine main beams, the secondary rafters would have been just 2.5m long.<sup>12</sup> Hence, here we have another interesting ascent among the many ascents that were applied in the architecture of Caesarea (Patrich 2018: 210–219).

It is clear that the shape of the third floor shown here, with columns in the front, is hypothetical. Not so the proposal regarding the Stair-Tower. This solution is the only feasible one, being derived from calculations based on the existing remains. It seems that the northern part of the double-tower was intended for ascent and the southern for descent. Such an arrangement ensured that every turn up the stairs, going either up, or down, would be to the right.<sup>13</sup> It is possible that in the lower entrance there was a pier that separated between two lanes. Such a pier was also needed to support the lintel and parts of the building above. It is also possible that a low partition divided the stairways running east-west into two parts, one for the ascenders and another for the descendants. These suggested pier and partitions are not shown in the reconstruction presented here.<sup>14</sup>

Several stair-towers with a horizontal wooden bridge are known. Thus, in case of the wooden bridge of the Stair-Tower (בית מטיבה) described in the Temple Scroll (which was only 7 cubits distant from the northern wall of the temple), that led to the Temple's roof.<sup>15</sup> In Qumran, it seems, a wooden bridge was running between the northern tower and the main building to its south.<sup>16</sup> As for the Stair-Tower, as mentioned, its shape is similar to that of the Observation Tower at the Temple of Jupiter in Baalbek. At the temple in Jerusalem, above the eastern gate of the inner courtyard - the Nicanor Gate - Herod built himself a defensive tower that must also have served as an observation tower that allowed him to watch the course of the sacrifices.<sup>17</sup>

As for the elevation of the stairs, their total number and the location of the various staircases in the double Stair-Tower at our concern, these were determined by the extant

<sup>9</sup> According to Netzer 2006: 87, the inner width of this temple was c. 12m. The width of the Hall and the Holy of Holies in the Second Temple in Jerusalem was 20 cubits, which are equivalent to 10.40m according to a long cubit of 52cm.

<sup>10</sup> As for the Nea Church see: Gutfeld, Avigad and Geva 2012: 236. However, such long ceiling beams were also supported by the roof-gable above.

<sup>11</sup> In the northern rock wall of the Temple Mount platform, dents of the main beams of the stoa drawn along this side of the Temple Mount were preserved. The socket dimensions are 48 x 48cm (Ritmeyer 2006: 128–129, the size given here is according to the scale given in that drawing). At the Qasr al-Bint Temple in Petra, some of the sockets of the main beams that roofed the temple's vestibule (9m deep), were preserved in the upper part of the vestibule's wall (no. 5 in the Archaeological Report). The dimensions of the sockets 47cm high and 25cm wide, indicate the thickness of the roofing beams (Zayadine, Larché and Dentzer-Feydy 2003: frontispiece pp. 21–22 and 136, 140, 142, 144, Figures 2, 6, 8, 10 respectively, and pp. 191, 195, 199, Photos 2, 8, 9 and 17. Retaining sockets in a denser rhythm were also preserved also in the two stories of the eastern chambers of the temple's adytum p. 204, Photo 29).

<sup>12</sup> A size of c. 2.5m of secondary ceiling beams of a temple or a church is not sizeable, but in case of a bridge, rather than a roof, this is reasonable.

Larger sizes are known as well. In a basilical hall roofed by colonnades, the intercolumniation determines the size of the secondary roofing beams. In the Royal Stoa on the Temple Mount the intercolumniation (according to Peleg-Barkat 2017: 100, note 13, reconstruction) was 3.25m (= c. 10 feet). The distances between the sockets in the rock delineating the Temple Mount on the north, mentioned above, is c. 3.2m. In Qasr al-Bint Temple in Petra, the distances between the main roofing beams, was just 50cm.

<sup>13</sup> A similar circulation system was also suggested for the double Altar Tower of Baalbek, as was indicated above.

<sup>14</sup> A double doorway is known, for example, in the Herodian Triclinium adjacent to Wilson Arch, Jerusalem (Patrich and Weksler-Bdolah 2016: 15\*–38\*; 2017: 50–54).

<sup>15</sup> *The Temple Scroll* XXX: 6–7 (Yadin 1977: 92–96; Qimron 1996: 45–46). The bridge connecting the top of the House of the Messibah with the upper storey of the sanctuary is named דרך (road): "ויבעליה הבית הזה: תעשה שער פתוח לגג ההיכל ודרך עשוי בשער הזה (א) לפרור ההיכל אשר יהיו באים בו לעליה ההיכל" (XXXI: 6–7, Qimron 1996: 46). For a graphical reconstruction see: Yadin 1985: 142–143.

<sup>16</sup> See reconstruction in: Hirschfeld 2004: 76, Fig. 32.

<sup>17</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities* XV, 424.

remains, such as the first east-west staircase, and by the height difference between the monumental pier and the top of the small vaults. The height of each step was set to be 25cm (c. half a cubit), like the elevation of the stairs in the Temple of Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup> Figure 4a indicates that the northern part of the Stair-Tower at our concern was slightly wider than the southern part. In the reconstruction presented here, the two parts are of the same width.

In the Byzantine period the Stair-Tower was replaced by a continuous staircase that was carried at its eastern end on an arch (Raban, Holum and Blakeley 1993: 42).<sup>19</sup> In order to be able to climb it from west to east, a plaza of huge kurkar stones was built on the edge of the quay, to the west, allowing a comfortable ascent from this direction. These are the plaza and restored staircase that are seen today. During the Crusader period many of the upper stones of this plaza were taken for other purposes. Thus, the stones of the lower layer, were exposed in the depth, while other stones remained in the perimeter. The shape obtained was of a pool with a floor of the lower stones.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> 'All the steps which were there [within the Temple mount] were a half a cubit in height and a half-cubit in tread' (*Middot* 2: 3, tr. J. Neusner).

<sup>19</sup> For a plan and reconstruction see: Holum 1999: 28, Fig. 13; 30 Fig. 17; 2020: 330, 336, Figs. 11.7 and 11.10; Stabler and Holum 2008: 24–25, Figs. 23, 24.

<sup>20</sup> Raban erred in identifying there a reflection pool, constructed as such from the very beginning (Raban 1996: 658–662). Holum (2020: 341–343), likewise commented about this wrong interpretation.



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# Three Unique Mausolea in the Western Upper Galilee

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*Mausolea built of 'free standing' sarcophagi that were once covered with heavy, impressive, gabled lids and bear protruding bosses on their short front side are one of funerary phenomena defined during the archaeological survey of the Shomera map (Western Upper Galilee). The largest mausoleum, at Horbat Dur, includes six sarcophagi, of which two are double, that stand in a row on a low podium. The second mausoleum, located at nearby Iqrit, includes five sarcophagi of which one is a double sarcophagus with a double boss designed as two altars. The third mausoleum, at Horbat Kukhim, has two sarcophagi placed on a high podium. These mausolea are located next to settlements and date to the Roman or possibly Byzantine periods. They are unique to the Upper Western Galilee, which is the southern boundary of their distribution area that begins in southern Turkey.*

KEYWORDS: MAUSOLEUM; ROMAN CEMETERY; TOMB; SARCOPHAGUS; GALILEE.

## Introduction

In the course of the archaeological survey that was undertaken within the boundaries of the area designated 'The Shomera Map', in the northern Western Galilee, near the Lebanese border, 26 cemeteries were surveyed (Aviam and Shalem 2020). These were obviously associated with ancient settlements, particularly sites dating to the Roman and Byzantine periods. Most of the burials were in cist tombs that were hewn into the limestone, and usually covered with a single large stone-slab, or 3–4 small ones, some were in hewn caves with arcosolia or niches and sometimes both. Some of the cemeteries contained also sarcophagi, which we called 'Free Standing Sarcophagi'. They were not interred underground or placed inside burial caves, but stood outside, within the area of the cemetery, at times close to the boundaries of the settlements. In 17 cases there was a protruding boss on one of the narrow sides of the sarcophagus, or on the lid. The bosses could be only roughly shaped, but in a few cases, they were carefully sculpted in the shape of an altar (Aviam 2005:264–271). Free standing sarcophagi were not found in other parts of Israel, with the exception of a small number in the eastern Upper Galilee. In contrast, very similar sarcophagi, with the same altar-shaped bosses were found in southern Lebanon. This type of sarcophagi, made of marble, was found in the Roman cemetery of Tyre (Chéhab 1984: Pls. LXVIIIa, LXXXVIb),<sup>1</sup> and it seems that the custom of burials in free-standing sarcophagi, some with a boss, and occasionally a boss that was shaped like an altar, originated in Lebanon.

In cemeteries in Israel sarcophagi were placed in burial caves, as for example in Bet Sh'arim; in mausolea, as in Tel Mevorakh; or interred in the ground as in Caesarea.

Free standing sarcophagi should therefore be considered as more than a mere place for burial. Conspicuous in the landscape, they become a statement of the presence of the deceased, and a memorial. In this way the free-standing sarcophagus becomes a miniaturized mausoleum.

Free standing sarcophagi on constructed podia were found in three sites within the territory of the Shomera map. The only comparable structures are the mausoleum known as 'the tomb of Shammai and his daughter in law' at Horbat Shema', in which a very large double sarcophagus stands on a podium (Meyers *et al.* 1976), and the mausoleum in Gush Halav where a large double sarcophagus stands on a podium above a burial cave (Vitto 1974). The two are found in close proximity in the eastern Upper Galilee, on the border with Phoenicia, within the boundaries of the Jewish settlement. These two structures, which are discussed below, like all free-standing sarcophagi, are within the Phoenician area, where the population was pagan in the Roman period, and Christian in the Byzantine period.

## The Mausoleum at Horbat Dur

Horbat Dur is a small site, about 0.6 acres, on top of a hill where two wadis meet. Survey of the site identified remains of buildings, parts of an oil-press and a lintel decorated with a cross, as well as pottery sherds from the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Medieval periods. In the western part of the site there is a reservoir, hewn into the rock and plastered. A hewn staircase leads down to the pool, and nearby a wine press is also hewn into the rock.

Between the pool and the winepress, in an area which is nearly level, six sarcophagi are lined on a north-south axis.

<sup>1</sup> Frankel and Getzov noticed these similarities in their surveys of the Akhziv and Hanita maps (Frankel and Getzov 1997: 47\*).

Each sarcophagus is hewn from a single block of stone (Figures 1–3). Two are double sarcophagi, and the separation between the two burial places is accentuated by a narrow channel between them. Each burial place has a monolithic gabled lid, with horns in the corners. Each single sarcophagus is 2.3m long, and 1.2m wide. The double sarcophagi are 2.45m wide, and their height is about 90cm. Space was left between the sarcophagi to allow passage during burial and to accommodate the mechanism to raise the lids. We believe that all the sarcophagi were hewn from the nearby rock, and the pit that was created, was then deepened to make the reservoir. The total width of the sarcophagi is 10m, and the reservoir is 10.5m long. The length of each sarcophagus is 2.3m, and the reservoir is 3.4m wide. All the sarcophagi have a boss on the narrow façade that faces an open area on the outskirts of the site, an area that

may have been used for assemblies. The bottom and the hewn head-rest are still visible for three of the burial places. The head-rest is on the same side as the boss. The sarcophagus farthest to the north is a double one, and beyond it there is a paved area that was probably used for ceremonies. The three sarcophagi to its south are single ones, and then another double one. The southernmost sarcophagus is a single one, and it was placed on a constructed podium because the ground slopes. We believe that the original mausoleum contained only five sarcophagi, with double ones at both ends. The final sarcophagus was added in a subsequent phase, a short time after the mausoleum was erected. This sarcophagus and its lid are identical to the others in design and size.

The upper face of the boss on the southern double sarcophagus is roughly shaped like an altar (Figure 4).

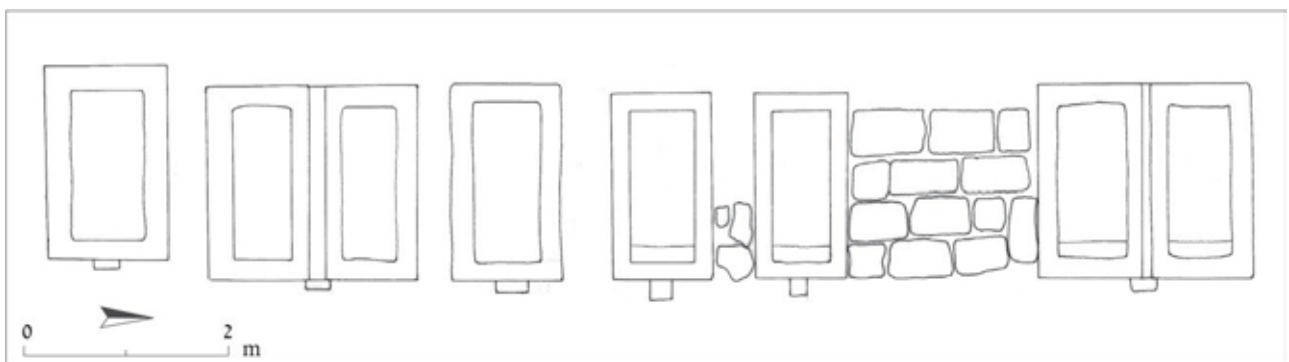


Figure 1. Horbat Dur, plan of the mausoleum.



Figure 2. Horbat Dur, the mausoleum, view to the west.





Figure 3. Horbat Dur, the mausoleum, view to the south.

The boss on the central single sarcophagus, which is larger and protrudes farther out than the others, is similarly shaped. Similar decoration appears also on sarcophagi elsewhere, such as the ones at Iqrit.

#### The Mausoleum at Iqrit

The Christian Arab village of Iqrit was situated until 1948 on an isolated hill, high up above its surrounding landscape, near to a source of water. Surveys and

excavations point to the village having occupied a tell with pottery from the Chalcolithic period, Early Bronze Age, Iron Age, and from the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Medieval periods, and until 1948.

At the bottom of the northern slope the remains of a free-standing sarcophagus decorated with a large boss shaped like an altar were found, and fragments of another sarcophagus. A short distance away a mausoleum that was largely covered by a large heap of field-clearing stones was exposed (Figures 5, 6). It comprises five free standing sarcophagi arranged in three pairs (one is a double sarcophagus). When the stone heap was cleared, four monolithic sarcophagi-lids were found in front of the mausoleum. The whole complex was 8.8m long and 3m wide, on an east-west axis. The eastern sarcophagus is a double one (2.1m wide). It has two large bosses shaped like altars on the façade, in contrast with the double sarcophagi at Horbat Dur, which have a single boss at the center. The double sarcophagus at Iqrit stands on a podium that was constructed as two cells. No finds that could securely date these sarcophagi were found in the excavation. The continuation of the podium westward could not be examined, and it is therefore not clear if it, too, contains cells. It is clear, however, that on the western edge the construction is solid. The plan and elevation of the mausoleum seem to indicate that the podium on which the pair of sarcophagi west of the double one stand was constructed in a second stage of development. The eastern sarcophagus of this pair retains a boss, but the boss on the other is mostly lost, seemingly deliberately removed. The westernmost pair of sarcophagi were placed on a course of stones that rises above the other courses at the top of the podium. These sarcophagi are only partially preserved, but it is obvious that both were without boss and that the one on the east,



Figure 4. Horbat Dur, the southern double sarcophagus.



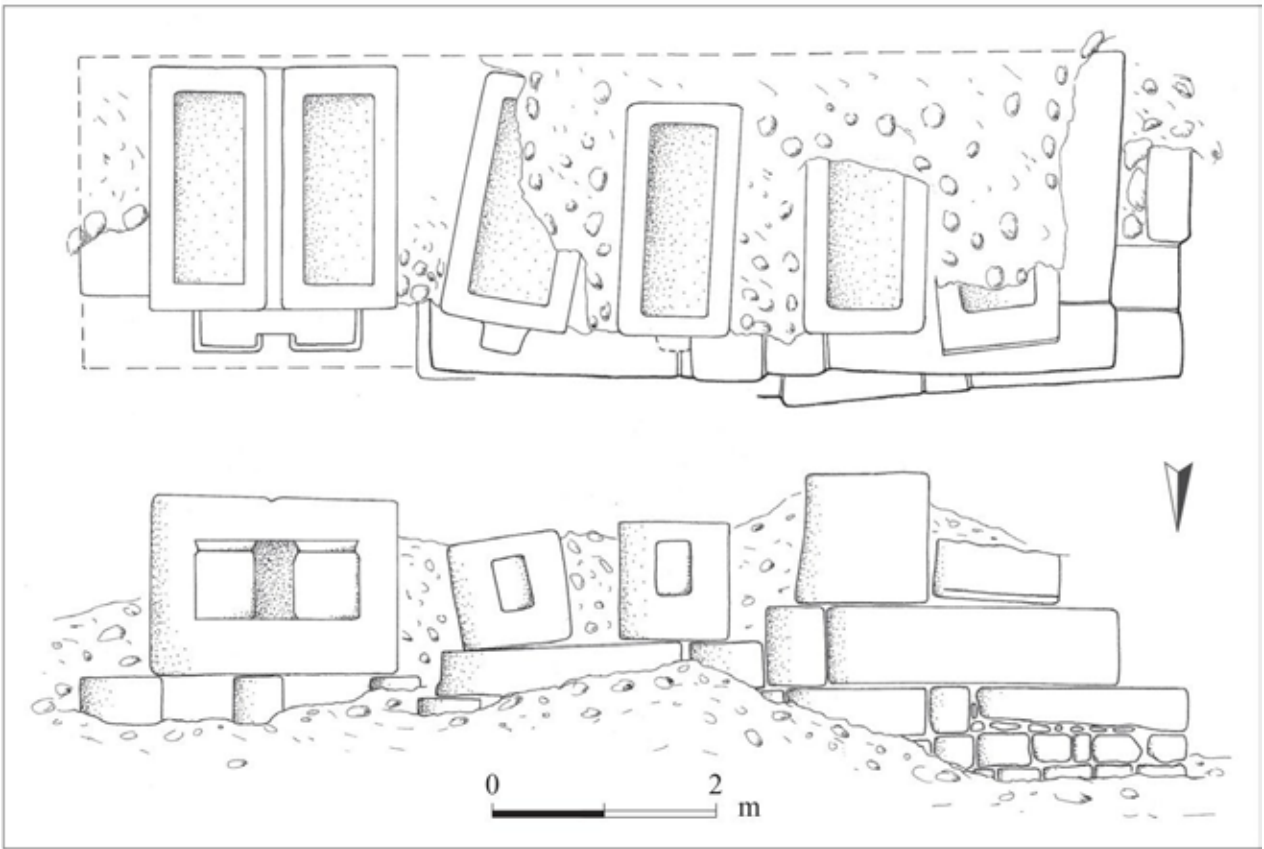


Figure 5. 'Iqrit, plan of the mausoleum.



Figure 6. 'Iqrit, the mausoleum.

whose façade is preserved, is larger than the two sarcophagi at the center of the podium, and taller than all of them. Only two of the four lids that were found during the partial exposure of the mausoleum were fully uncovered. All four are gabled, with horns protruding in the corners, and the two whose narrow side was

uncovered, have a unique boss shaped as  $\perp$ . It should be noted that only three sarcophagi in the free-standing group have a boss on the lid but not on the body, and this is when the body was hewn in-situ and did not protrude much above the surface. The obvious conclusion would be that the two lids with bosses that were lying apart belong

to the western sarcophagi that have no bosses, but the precise, well-smoothed finish of the lids is identical to that of the double sarcophagus, and therefore at variance with the rough shaping of the western sarcophagi without bosses.

Unlike the Horbat Dur mausoleum, where all the sarcophagi have bosses, it is possible to suggest that in Iqrit the significance of the bosses changed as the mausoleum developed. The double sarcophagus, which we believe was the first to be erected has, as said above, a precise, smooth finish. Its bosses are large and very protruding, and shaped like altars. The central pair of sarcophagi was shaped with less care, the boss on the eastern one is simple, while the boss of the western one was, as we said, removed, apparently on purpose. The western pair, on the other hand, was made without bosses. It is possible therefore to suggest that the development of the mausoleum from east to west is also manifest in a change to the significance of the boss. The bosses on the first double sarcophagus, in which the *'patresfamilias'* may have been buried, could have been used to pour libation or to place gifts for the deceased<sup>2</sup>. If the lids with the special boss indeed covered this pair of sarcophagi, it is possible that the boss and the 'ledge' below it was used for the same purpose. The bosses on the central pair of sarcophagi could serve to pour libations or to place an oil lamp, but they seem to have become symbolic. One was eventually removed for an unknown reason. By the time the third pair of sarcophagi was erected, the bosses seem to have lost their significance.

### The mausoleum at Horbat Kukhim

Horbat Kukhim extends over an area of about 2.5 acres on the slope of a hill. Pottery sherds were found from the Chalcolithic, Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Medieval periods. Well-preserved houses still with their lintels and oil-presses are among the remains at the site. In the south-western part of the site a hewn winepress was found. Wide expanses of rock on the southern outskirts of the site were used to hew burial caves with niches and cist tombs, which gave the site its name (*Kukhim* = niches in Hebrew). Next to the south-western houses of the site a mausoleum that comprises two adjacent free-standing sarcophagi oriented north-south was found (Figures 7, 8). The sarcophagi stand on a square podium (3.45 x 3.45m), whose western side is founded on the rock. The podium is constructed of a frame of rough ashlar, filled with field-stones. In two places the white mortar that consolidated the fieldstones is still preserved. The same type of mortar was used in the construction of the surface on which the western sarcophagus stands (2.45 x 1.15m; height: 1.2 m).

On the northern and southern sides of this sarcophagus, close to the rim on the outside, there are square niches (about 5cm deep) that were used to fix the lid with metal joints. A fragment of the lid, with horns, lies next to the

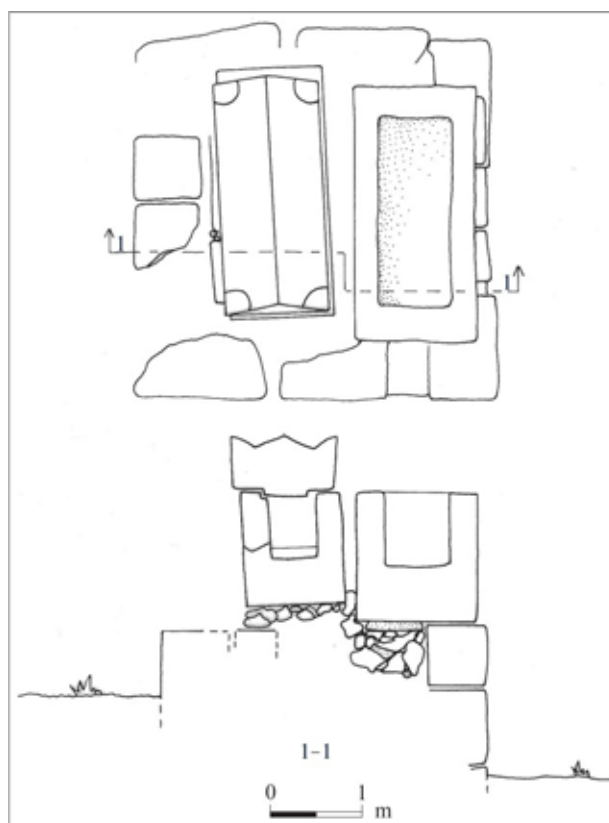


Figure 7. Horbat Kukhim, plan of the mausoleum.



Figure 8. Horbat Kukhim, the mausoleum, view to the south.

base of the podium. A gabled lid with horns lies on the eastern sarcophagus (2.15 x 1.10m; height: 1.10m), slightly off its proper place. On the eastern wall of the sarcophagus a hole was broken, apparently during a robbery. At the southern end of the burial place a head-rest (height: 10cm; width: 10cm) is carved, and in the north-eastern end, a small niche (diameter: 15cm; depth: 7cm).

### Discussion

The survey of the Shomera map area contributed important information regarding the customs of burial in free standing sarcophagi, and particularly in the ones with boss.

<sup>2</sup> At the top of the gabled-lid of the sarcophagus at Horbat Ukkam there is a boss in the shape of an altar, whose upper face is concave,

apparently for mortuary ritual, perhaps to pour libation or to place a gift (Aviam and Shalem 2020: Site 47).



As had been suggested in the past, the sarcophagi in the Western Galilee (and to a certain extent also the two mausolea in the eastern Upper Galilee) mark the southern boundary of a distribution area that begins in southern Turkey. It seems that the custom began in Asia minor, as can be seen in the large cemetery of free-standing sarcophagi in Termessos, where there are scores of giant sarcophagi placed on high podia. A large proportion of them are decorated and bear inscriptions that date to the Roman period (Uysal and Buyruk 1990). In the cemetery of Tyre free standing sarcophagi were found: single, double and even triple ones, standing on high podia. Some have a boss, and at least one of these bosses is shaped like an altar. Free standing sarcophagi — single, double and one triple (hewn from a single block of stone) — some with a boss, were found in the Lebanese village of Ramyah near the Israeli border and are mentioned in the survey of Guérin (1880: 68).

The mausolea discussed here were found in close proximity to settlements that were occupied over a long time, including the Roman and Byzantine periods. On the basis of the dated parallels from Termessos and Tyre it is possible to assume that the Mausolea in the Western Galilee also date to the Roman or possibly Byzantine periods. The other free-standing sarcophagi were also found near sites from these periods.

The three mausolea that were presented here are, as we said, a phenomenon unique to the Upper Galilee. Mausolea that comprise a row of free-standing sarcophagi are unique to the Western Galilee, starting with the six in Horbat Dur, through the five in Iqrit, and ending with the two in Horbat Kukhim. They developed from the stand-alone free-standing sarcophagi, and presumably were used for family burials of the upper class. In two of these mausolea, there are bosses on one of the short faces of the sarcophagi, some of them shaped like an altar. We assume that at first the bosses had a functional role in the burial customs, and were used as a place to pour libation, burn incense, place oil lamps or gifts — as is clearly the case in Horbat Ukkam. As is often the case, with time the functional element became symbolic.

The two large mausolea, in Horbat Dur and Iqrit are within 800m of each other, and influence between them is

Highly probable, but it is not possible to say with certainty in which direction. It is possible that the double sarcophagus from Iqrit is the earliest, since it is carefully shaped and the altars that were carved on its façade are large and functional. The sarcophagi with bosses from Iqrit and Horbat Dur were apparently installed at a later date and imitate it. The fact that Iqrit was a larger and more central site than Horbat Dur, supports the suggestion that it was there that this local phenomenon originated.

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# Unfinished Business: What Caused the Sudden Cessation of the Construction Works during the Foundation of Aelia Capitolina?<sup>1</sup>

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*This paper deals with a phenomenon that characterizes, as far as the archaeological evidence is telling, the monumental urban foundation of Aelia Capitolina. In several places throughout the city, e.g., in the Eastern and Western Cardines and the Northern City Gate, the archaeological finds indicate a sudden cessation of construction, after the bulk of work has already been carried out. It should be emphasized that although the construction ceased - the buildings, or streets in question, were put to use and in some cases continued to be used for centuries; however, the final stages of the construction and embellishment did not take place, and therefore their appearance was of an unfinished project, turning the city into less embellished and monumental compared to other cities of the Roman East.*

KEYWORDS: AELIA CAPITOLINA; JERUSALEM; BAR KOKHBA REVOLT; HADRIAN; ARCHITECTURAL DECORATION; URBAN PLANNING; COLONNADED STREETS; MONUMENTAL ARCHES.

## Introduction

Archaeological excavations that took place in the Old City of Jerusalem in recent decades have tipped the scales on a long-lasting debate concerning the date of the establishment of Aelia Capitolina. In the past, scholars have argued over the question whether Hadrian's decision to re-found the city of Jerusalem as a Roman colony named Aelia Capitolina was the reason or the consequence of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, basing their arguments, mainly on various historical evidence<sup>2</sup> and numismatic finds.<sup>3</sup> There were almost no archaeological finds *in-situ* that could decide the debate. Nevertheless, recent excavations of the eastern cardo in the Western Wall Plaza (Weksler-Bdolah and Onn 2019), as well as from below several arches of a 100m long Roman bridge, dubbed 'the Giant Viaduct', or the 'Great Causeway', which carried the decumanus of Aelia Capitolina (Onn and Weksler-Bdolah 2017), have filled in the gaps by discovering findings directly related to the foundation of the Roman city and dating them. The finds testify that massive infrastructure works in preparation for the paving of the main streets of the city took place in the Hadrianic period, most probably before the revolt broke out. These excavations have also shown that plans for the new city and preparations for its redesigned net of streets and public buildings were already done sometime before, or immediately after, the famous visit of Hadrian in Judaea in AD 130, namely before the Bar-Kokhba Revolt (AD 132–136).

In this paper we would like to draw attention to an interesting phenomenon that characterizes, as far as the archaeological evidence is telling, the monumental urban foundation of Aelia Capitolina. In several places throughout the city, the archaeological finds indicate a sudden cessation of construction, after the bulk of work has already been carried out. It should be emphasized that although the construction-operations ceased - the buildings, or streets in question, were put to use and in some cases continued to be used for centuries; however, the final stages of the construction and embellishment did not take place, and therefore their appearance was of an unfinished project, turning the city into less embellished and monumental compared to other cities of the Roman East.

Below, we will briefly describe the relevant findings, and then discuss possible explanations for this peculiar phenomenon.

## The Eastern Cardo

The Eastern Cardo is one of the main arteries of Aelia Capitolina (Geva 1985; Mazor 2007; Tsafrir 1999: 143–144; Weksler-Bdolah 2020: 74–95 *inter alia*). Remains of the colonnaded Eastern Cardo have been discovered at 20 different locations at a depth of three to four meters below *HaGai/El-Wad* Street.<sup>4</sup> The ancient street was c. 800m long, running from the plaza inside Damascus Gate in the

<sup>1</sup> This article is devoted with great appreciation to our dear friend and colleague Gabriel (Gabi) Mazor, whose vast commend and love for archaeology in general, and the Roman period remains in particular – focusing his research on urban architecture, public and private structures, Roman sculpture and more - contributed and enriched us with great knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> Cassius Dio (LXIX, 12: 1); Eusebius (Eus. HE IV: 6); The Mishnah (Ta'anit 4, 6); Epiph. De mens, 14; Chron. Pasch., 613.

<sup>3</sup> See summary of the numismatic evidence in Weksler-Bdolah 2020: 52–54.

<sup>4</sup> For summary the various excavations along el-Wad Street, see Weksler-Bdolah 2020: 74–95.



*Figure 1. The Eastern Cardo of Aelia Capitolina as discovered in the Western Wall Plaza Excavations, looking southwest (Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah).*

north to about 60m south of the Old City Wall, near the Dung Gate in the south.

A 50m long segment of the ancient street, recently exposed to its full width beneath the Western Wall Plaza, shows



that its average width was 24m (Figure 1). The 8m wide central carriageway was paved with large slabs of the local *mizzi hilu* limestone, which were arranged diagonally to the street's axis. A municipal drain was built beneath the street to channel the rainwater south. Narrow sidewalks, 1.5m wide on either side, lined the street at a higher level than that of the carriageway. The sidewalks were paved with flagstones resembling those of the carriageway, although here they were placed parallel to the street's axis. The street was flanked with rows of columns, part of a 6.5m wide portico on each side. In the section exposed in the Western Wall Plaza a row of shops bordered the street on its west side, whereas on the east side remains of a gatehouse (*propylaeum*) that probably led into a public structure were discovered between two streets leading eastward from the Cardo.

Prior to the construction of the colonnaded street, preparatory work was conducted to adjust the steep topography of the Western Hill's slope to the axis and level of the Roman thoroughfare. The leveling of the surface to just below the level of the cardo involved the removal of earlier building remains in the lower parts of the slope and the strengthening of the remains left so that they could serve as a foundation for the street's pavement. Abandoned quarries and hewn installations along the route of the street were intentionally filled up to the level of the cardo.

In the upper parts of the slope, the bedrock itself had to be quarried away. The work resulted in the creation of a vertical cliff, 11m high, running north-south c. 25m along the western side of the street. In the lower part of the cliff,

cells, separated from one another by hewn walls, were carved at the same time, to be used later as shops.

The findings indicate that the preparatory works for the street's paving were executed with typical Roman precision. The total leveling of the heterogeneous surface and the subsequent construction of a sophisticated drainage system along the route of the street were completed in an orderly manner, but something slowed the works down and the paving work on the road was not completed. The columns of the porticoes were left in their 'quarried state' without being finished (see below) and the porticoes' floors were not paved. The uneven hewn surface of the western portico still bears the negative impressions of carved blocks that were hewn out (Figure 2), and no original paving stones of the Roman period were preserved along the western, nor the eastern porticos. These traits seem to indicate that the leveling of the porticos has never been finished, and therefore their paving has similarly never been carried out.

### The Colonnades of the Eastern Cardo

Out of the dozens of fragments from decorative architectural elements that were found in the Western Wall Plaza excavations (Peleg-Barkat 2019), five column bases (four pseudo-Tuscan or single-torus column bases and one of the Attic type) and six column-shaft sections can be attributed with much certainty to the original colonnades that flanked the Eastern Cardo during the Roman period. The architectural members in this group share the same dimensions (diameter c. 60cm), whitish limestone, and most prominently their unfinished state. One of the column



Figure 2. A segment of the Eastern Cardo in the Western Wall Plaza excavations: Pavement of carriageway and western sidewalk (bottom); the uneven foundation of the western portico (center), and the western, hewn row of shops (upper part). Looking west (Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah).



Figure 3. Blocked-out pseudo-Tuscan column base *in situ* on the western portico of the Eastern cardo, with a section of a monolithic column, standing atop it upside-down (Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah).

bases was found *in situ* along the line of the western colonnade (Figure 3), making the attribution of this assemblage to the original colonnade quite unequivocal.

The Column Bases: Four column bases made of hard limestone (*mizzi hilu*) and relating to one type were found in and around the eastern cardo. As stated above, one was found *in situ* along the line of the western colonnade. The others were incorporated in secondary use into a wall and a pier dating from the Early to the Late Islamic periods (Figure 4). The bases all share a very simple design that includes two moldings: a 22–28cm high plinth and a single blocked-out torus, 14–20cm high. The blocked-out torus was left rough with a rounded profile of a quarter-circle.

Above the torus is a 16–18cm high plain section, the bottommost part of the column shaft. The upper diameter



Figure 4. Blocked-out pseudo-Tuscan column base incorporated in secondary use in an early Islamic period wall on the western part of the Eastern cardo. Looking south (Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah).

of the bases is 66–72cm. The blocked-out state of the bases explains the relatively large differences in the upper diameter (up to 6cm). Another, similar column base but of larger dimensions (with an upper diameter of 82cm) was a surface find at the dig.<sup>5</sup> The Cardo bases differ from the type commonly used in the eastern provinces, namely the eastern Attic base, which bears two tori separated by a scotia and two fillets. Those from the Cardo are reminiscent of a much simpler column base of the Tuscan order that bears a single torus above a plinth, known in research as ‘pseudo-Tuscan’.<sup>6</sup>

Another column base found *in situ* is the heart-shaped Attic base of a square pier with two attached half columns (Figure 5). The base stands on the line of the stylobate of the eastern colonnade, at the intersection where a street dated to the Byzantine period (6th century AD), but

<sup>5</sup> This column base has a 14cm high plinth and a 20cm high angular blocked-out torus, which differs from the rounded torus of the smaller bases. Three similar column bases (with a similar diameter of 83–87cm) were found *in situ* southwest of the Dung Gate along the line of the Eastern Cardo (Ben-Dov 1982: 227–230), a few tens of meters south of the Western Wall Plaza excavation area. Ben-Dov suggested a Byzantine period date for the paving of the Cardo and the column bases along its western walkway; however, the findings from this excavation still wait publication.

<sup>6</sup> The Tuscan order is a native Roman order, whose invention is attributed by Vitruvius to the Etruscans (*de Architectura*, IV, 7). Despite the fact that Vitruvius describes Tuscan columns as ‘straggly’ and claims that already in his time the Tuscan column was more often made of wood than stone, the Tuscan order was not neglected and was actually preferred by the Roman architects over the Greek Doric order in some

types of monuments, especially for honorific columns and in amphitheatres. Its common use in amphitheatres may be a deliberate attempt to emphasize the ‘Italic’ origin of the amphitheater versus the temple and the theater, which had come from the Greeks (Rykwert 1999: 351–352, 366). In addition, the Tuscan column may have carried nationalistic or military overtones, which were seen to be appropriate given the origins of gladiatorial combat (Onians 1988: 272; Wilson Jones 2003: 110). The Tuscan order is not often found in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire. The pseudo-Tuscan bases, or single-torus bases, which sometimes bear a resemblance to the Tuscan base, might be simplified local versions of the Attic base. These bases often bear columns with Ionic or Corinthian capitals, although examples of Tuscan capitals also exist, mainly in synagogues in the Upper Galilee (e.g., Belkin 1990:100–103, Figs. 35, 36; Peleg-Barkat 2010: 163, Fig. 5.2:4–6).





Figure 5 Heart shaped blocked-out Attic column base in situ on the eastern portico of the Eastern Cardo of Aelia Capitolina in the Western Wall Plaza. Looking north (Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah).

probably based on an earlier street, descends eastward from the Cardo. As with the pseudo-Tuscan bases, the upper diameter of the attached half-column bases is 68cm,

but its profile is somewhat different: it has a 36cm high plinth, and two angular blocked-out tori: the bottom one 18cm high, the upper one 12cm high. Between the blocked-out tori there is a plain section, 10cm in height, representing a blocked-out scotia or trochilos of the Attic base. The excavators suggest that the heart-shaped column base and the elevated plaza to its east are part of a gatehouse (propylaeum) leading into a larger structure erected on the eastern portico of the Cardo, which existed in the 6th century AD, but was apparently built in an earlier period. This structure created a hiatus in the sequence of columns in the eastern colonnade and a different type of decoration was set up along its facade, probably situated a few meters east of the western portico's colonnade.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the fact that this base is a blocked-out Attic rather than a pseudo-Tuscan base, its dimensions, blocked-out form and high plinth all point to the fact that it belongs to the same phase of construction as the column bases discussed above.

**The Column Shafts:** Six sections of column shafts made of *meleke* limestone with a diameter of 58-64cm were exposed at the site (Figure 6) and seem to match the pseudo-Tuscan column bases described above.<sup>8</sup> Three of the shaft sections are preserved to their original height (1.30-2.12m). One of them was exposed standing upside down on the above-mentioned it alics column base along the line of the western colonnade of the Cardo. Four other sections were found incorporated into Early Islamic walls. The sixth column section was found on the floor of a Late Islamic–early Ottoman structure. It was re-cut and reused



Figure 6. Blocked-out column section from the Eastern Cardo of Aelia Capitolina (Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah).

by the dwellers of this structure as a stone basin. Despite its poor state of preservation, the matching diameter (64-65cm) stone type and chiseling style, suggest that it belongs to the same group of column sections.

The column shafts have originally consisted of two long drums or sections. The three complete shaft sections belong to the upper part of the shaft. Their diameter diminishes toward the top, where a 10cm high projecting collar is carved. During the Roman period, it was customary to carve the column shafts at the quarry with their *entasis*, leaving the ends of the shafts rough as a protective collar to minimize damage during handling and transport. Normally, when the shafts reached their destination, the collars were reduced and carved with the required moldings, namely it alics at the bottom and an astragal at the top (Wilson Jones 2003: 131). Clearly, as with the column bases, the column shafts were left in their quarried state (still bearing their collar) and their carving was never finished. The diameter of the columns (c. 60cm) corresponds with those of the Western Cardo of Aelia Capitolina (62cm), as preserved today in the Russian Church of Alexander Nevsky and at the seventh station of the Via Dolorosa (Vincent and Abel 1914: Pl. VIII: 1). This correspondence, combined with the fact that this is the largest homogenous group of column shafts found in the Western Wall Plaza excavation and their relationship both in diameter and unfinished state to the *in-situ* column base and its corresponding group, all lead to the conclusion that these column shafts originated in the colonnades that once flanked the Eastern Cardo.

The crude style and execution of the bases and columns stand in sharp contrast to the high quality of the street paving and to the extensive rock-cutting and massive substructure works that were executed prior to the paving of the street. They also stand in contrast to the embellished colonnades of the main thoroughfares in other Roman cities in the region, such as Nysa-Scythopolis and Gerasa.

<sup>7</sup> A pier with two attached columns once stood above the heart-shaped base. The attached column facing east implies that perhaps more columns stood to the east of the pier, flanking a small court in front of the propylaeum's facade. Marking or emphasizing entrances into important public buildings along colonnaded streets with a different type of column was a well-attested practice in Roman cities (MacDonald 1986: 44; Segal 1995: Fig. 36).

<sup>8</sup> While the upper diameters of these bases are somewhat larger (66–72cm), it should be remembered that the bases were left in an unfinished state, and therefore their final intended diameter would have been smaller. Moreover, the preserved shaft sections originate mostly from the upper part of the columns that were, according to Greek and Roman style, smaller than their lower part (Vitruvius, *de Architectura* III, 3, 13).



The simplicity of the design and the blocked-out state of the column bases and column shafts found in the Western Wall Plaza excavations could have been attributed to a lack of resources at the time when the colonnades were erected along the *Cardo*, but since they join other evidence for the neglect of this endeavor at its midst, it seems more plausible to suggest that their unfinished state is a consequence of an historical event that caused the interruption of the work on the decoration of the colonnades (see below). The fact that the unfinished columns continued to stand along the *Cardo* throughout its long period of use and were never replaced or completed is intriguing. The possibility that the columns were covered with stucco to create a finished appearance is rather unlikely; columns along main thoroughfares, in contrast to indoor columns, were exposed to the elements and abrasion caused by the large crowds of pedestrians, and thus they were normally not coated with plaster. Moreover, blocked-out architectural members that had their finishing details added in stucco had to first go through a phase of reduction to make their carved shape smaller than their intended finished state. However, the carved profiles of the column bases under discussion, as well as the collars on the column shafts, are larger than their intended state.

### The Western *Cardo*

The Western *Cardo* of the Roman city led in a direct line from the plaza inside the Northern Gate of Aelia Capitolina, to the south, probably reaching the camp of the Tenth Legion's garrison. Sections of ancient stone paving made of large limestone slabs set on top of a rock-hewn drainage channel were discovered already in 1947 along the entire length (c. 400m) of *Beit HaBad/ Khan e-Zeit* Street at a depth of 1-1.2m beneath the current street level (Johns 1948: 94; Weksler-Bdolah 2020: 67, Figs. 28, 29). The appearance of the remains, as far as can be determined according to the published photos – highly resembles the construction of the Eastern *Cardo*. At several points along the west side of the street, column pedestals and sections of monolithic columns have been discovered *in situ*, marking its western edge. South of *Beit HaBad/ Khan e-Zeit* Street, three parallel narrow alleys continue south for another 150m, until they reach the intersection with *David* Street, near the proposed site of the legionary camp's gate. The total width of the three market streets, of roughly 22.5m, reflects the original width of the Western *Cardo*, including both the carriageway and the side porticoes (Mazor 2007; Tsafirir 1999: 144).

Interestingly, excavations carried out in recent years east or west of the area of the carriageway, in places where the porticoes and shop cells are supposed to have stood, have yielded finds dated to the Byzantine period (5th–6th centuries AD), or later, with no *in situ* remains of the

Roman period pavements in neither the sidewalks, porticos or shops.

Thus, for example, an ancient entrance threshold, 3m wide, was discovered inside a modern shop on 107 *Beit HaBad/ Khan e-Zeit* Street. The threshold lies along the axis of the modern street, facing west and is situated where one would expect to find remains pavement of the Western *Cardo*. East of the threshold, a floor made of large stone slabs was discovered abutting the threshold. The remains were dated to the Byzantine period and identified as an entrance to a public building (Landes-Nagar, *in press*). Remains of two rectangular cells (c. 3 × 5m), lying immediately east of 107 *Beit HaBad/ Khan e-Zeit* Street, near the corner of *Aqabat e-Takiya (Ma'alot HaMidrasa)* Street, were identified as part of a row of shops on the east side of the Roman *Cardo*, but the finds within them were all dated to the Byzantine period, or later (Weksler-Bdolah 2020: 69).<sup>9</sup>

On the western side of *Beit HaBad/ Khan e-Zeit* Street, opposite the remains described above, a stone pavement made of large flagstones, possibly part of the western portico of the Western *Cardo*, was revealed and dated to the Byzantine period as well.<sup>10</sup> Further south, two stone slabs were discovered to the east of the presumed line of the Western *Cardo* in *Aderet Eliyahu Yeshiva* (Zelinger 2014). They are located along the same axis of the presumed shops in *Dar Consul* (see footnote 9), and may belong to a similar shop cell, or a narrow passageway between two shop cells. These remains were also dated to the Byzantine period (mid-6th century AD).

As described above – although the appearance of the Western *Cardo*'s carriageway pavement is Roman, all the remains that were recently discovered east and west of it, have been dated to the Byzantine period. While it is possible that the Roman remains were robbed or dismantled at a later date, the absence of Roman remains in all these salvage excavations, may indicate that the paving of the Western *Cardo*'s porticos, and the construction of the shops built beyond them, were not completed during the Roman period, but rather only in the Byzantine period.

### The Northern Gate of Aelia Capitolina (Under Damascus Gate)

The Northern City Gate of Aelia Capitolina, whose remains were discovered beneath the Ottoman Damascus Gate, is a fortified city gate, consisting of a triple-portal decorative arch that is set between flanking towers. Archaeological excavations exposed the eastern of the three portals, the towers on each of its sides and part of the plaza inside the gate.<sup>11</sup> The eastern gateway is considered one of the best-preserved monuments of the Hadrianic city.

<sup>9</sup> Further to the north, remains along the same axis of the abovementioned cells, may represent other shop cells, along the *cardo*. Remains of stone pavements, and other finds there were also dated to the Byzantine period. The excavations in *Dar Consul* on behalf of the IAA were directed by Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah (2017), and Annette Landes-Nagar (2018–2021). We thank Annette Landes-Nagar for the information, and permission to cite her report on the excavations in *Khan e-Zeit* Street.

<sup>10</sup> The excavations, inside a shop cell in *Khan e-Zeit* Street 146 on behalf of the IAA, were directed by Annette Landes-Nagar. We thank Landes-Nagar for the information.

<sup>11</sup> Mazor 2007: 121; Wightman 1989: 35–43. For a summary of the excavations undertaken in the Gate's complex and references see Weksler-Bdolah 2020: 60–63.



Figure 7. The eastern opening of the Northern Gate of Aelia Capitolina, looking south-east. Pay notice to the blocked-out apophyge on the column base to the east (left) of the opening (Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah).

Nevertheless, even this monument that has seemingly been completed shows several unfinished traits. For example, above the eastern pedestal (on the eastern side of the gate's opening) is an Attic base. The apophyge of this base remained in a blocked-out state (Figure 7; Wightman 1989: 40–43, Fig. 12, Pl. 175), carved in a very similar fashion to the blocked-out tori of the Heart-Shaped Attic base from the Western Wall Plaza excavations.

The fact that this detail of the column base was never finished is intriguing. It should also be noted that, as with the column bases found in the Western Wall Plaza excavations, the column bases adorning the Northern Gate are also carved in one piece together with the bottommost section of the column shaft. This feature contrasts with most Roman column bases in our region that do not include a section of the shaft on top. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest a similar date in the 2nd century AD for the carving of the columns in the Eastern Cardo and the Northern Gate of Aelia Capitolina.

Another element whose design has not been completed is the facade of the eastern tower of the Hadrianic Northern Gate. The facade of the towers was built of 'Herodian' style, flat-paneled masonry, unlike the main facade of the gate that possessed enough architectural ornament and articulation without the added elaboration of drafted masonry (Wightman 1989: 38). An examination of the

draft lines on the exterior of the eastern tower revealed that the drafting had been done after the blocks had been set in place. However, as Wightman noted, some blocks in the northern face of the tower reveal scoring lines for vertical drafts which for some reason had been left uncarved, and other blocks on the tower's western face reveal drafts that only begun to be carved before work was suspended (Figure 8).

#### The Odeon/Bouleuterion under Wilson's Arch

Excavations below the monumental Wilson's arch, in a relatively small area (14.8m long, 12.9m wide) between the western carrying wall of Wilson's Arch and the Western Wall of the Herodian Temple Mount, have exposed a small theater-like structure or odeon, that according to the excavators is dated to the first half of the 2nd century (Uziel *et al.* 2019). The interior of the building was semi-circular and the exterior rectangular. A narrow stage area (2m wide and 10m long) was located on the western side of the structure, with pedestals extending on either end. The building was entered through two *aditus maximi*, (each 1.5m wide) located north and south of the *orchestra*. The *orchestra* was 6m in diameter, and beyond it were the foundation of the cavea, that according to the excavators would have allowed, if ever completed, c. 150–200 persons to gather inside the building.





Figure 8. The eastern tower of the Northern Gate of Aelia Capitolina with several ashlars, whose drafted margins are not fully carved. Looking north-east (Shlomit Weksler-Bdolah).

Interestingly, the construction of the odeon structure was never completed. The moldings of the pedestals and the wall that encircles the orchestra were mostly left blocked-out, the staircase and the stage area were also left in an unfinished state that prevented their intended use. In addition to the above – only one (possible) paving stone was found in the *orchestra*, and no remains of seats were found in the *cavea* (the excavators mention just one, not *in-situ*, stone that may have been part of a seat). The interior of the building was sealed below earthen fills containing small finds that were dated to the 2nd-3rd centuries AD (Uziel *et al.* 2019: 250).

According to the excavators, the reasons behind the abandonment of the odeon are purely speculative at this point (Uziel *et al.* 2019: 260), and the excavators suggested they may have stemmed from an historical event (such as the Bar Kokhva Revolt or the death of Hadrian), or more mundane reasons such as the termination of funds or perhaps constructional faults.

### Summary and Discussion

The archaeological remains from the two main thoroughfares of Aelia Capitolina – the Eastern and Western Cardo – its northern gate and at least one of its public buildings – the odeon\ bouleterion below Wilson's Arch – all point to the same phenomenon. On the one hand

they bear evidence for the large-scale preparatory works that were carried out according to an orderly urban plan, during the founding of Aelia Capitolina; but on the other hand they all show a sharp, abrupt pause in their construction and eventually, the effort of laying down the foundations for the renewed city did not mature into a proper city shaped like other cities in the Roman East (as Samaria, Nysa-Scythopolis, Gadara, etc.).

During the preparatory works, the axes of the main streets were set according to an orthogonal plan, along straight, parallel, or perpendicular lines, with slopes as moderate as possible. Massive quarrying activity took place, creating high rock cliffs, which delimited the main streets. Quarry depressions, or ancient hewn installations along the line of the streets were intentionally filled-up, and sophisticated drainage systems were installed along the streets, below the paving. However, following the pause in the construction operation, the Eastern Cardo was probably left without paved porticoes, at least along some of its sections, and its columns were left in their 'quarry state'. The Western Cardo was possibly left in a similar manner without paved porticos. The exterior of the northern city gate was not finalized, and the construction of the odeon\bouleoterion was never completed.

Interestingly, this 'unfinished work', associated with the foundation of Aelia Capitolina finds an interesting parallel



in the Temple Mount compound of the late Second Temple period. In the case of the Herodian complex, the final design of the northern part of the Western Wall of this complex remained incomplete. For example, projecting bedrock, which constituted part of the Antonia Hill, was cut along the line of the Western Wall, and shaped to appear like an integral part of the Herodian construction, imitating Herodian ashlar, with drafted margins and flat bosses. But the work was never completed – the facade of the cut segments remained ununiformed, and the bedrock often protrudes westwards beyond the line of the wall. In addition, separating lines between the imitated Herodian blocks are sometimes missing, and the faces of some of the ‘real’ stone blocks in these northern segments were left with rough bosses and only partial drafted margins (Mazar 2011: 105–111).

Unfinished construction works in the Roman period are not unheard of. Admittedly, many reasons for not completing construction projects can be suggested, including lack of budget, economic crisis, construction failures, etc.,. However, the abrupt end in the two cases of Roman Jerusalem presented here, seem to indicate, to our minds, an unexpected upheaval that disrupted the continuation of the work or stopped it altogether.

During the Roman period Jerusalem was affected by two catastrophic wars: the Great Revolt (AD 66–70), and the Bar Kokhba Revolt (AD 132–136). In our opinion, it is not inconceivable that the outbreak of the Great Revolt ended the works along the walls of the Temple Mount,<sup>12</sup> while the Bar Kokhba Revolt caused the cessation of construction and development works of the new Roman city of Aelia Capitolina. Since the preparatory works for the establishment of the new colonia were carried out immediately after the declaration of the founding of the city, and perhaps even earlier, it is likely that they were carried out by Roman soldiers that were stationed in the camp of the Tenth Roman Legion in Jerusalem. However, with the outbreak of the revolt, the soldiers were directed to suppress the uprising and were not available to continue the municipal construction activities anymore.

An equally important question is why those unfinished projects remained unfinished even after the revolt has been successfully suppressed? One possible answer may be that the new city lacked civil elite that would fund the continuation of the building projects. Most of the building inscriptions that are known to date from Aelia Capitolina were dedicated by military units or the city council (Cotton *et al.* 2012: I, 2, nos. 722–728). They bear almost no evidence for the involvement of private citizens in the public constructions in the city, unlike the well-attested practice in other Roman cities of the East.

Another possible explanation for the cessation and holding of the building operations may be connected with the death of Hadrian. The emperor probably had a personal interest in the development of the city that he named after himself. Only two colonies were named after Hadrian: Aelia

Capitolina and Aelia Mursa on the Drava River, a tributary of the Danube (now Osijek, in Croatia). It is not inconceivable that following the death of the emperor, the imperial interest, as well as the funding for further development ceased to pour in the direction of Aelia Capitolina.

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<sup>12</sup> Information arising from recent archaeological excavations around the walls of the Temple Mount indicate the continuation of the construction

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# The Roman Veterans' Settlement at Moza c. AD 70–130

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*Recent excavations at the site of Moza, in the western outskirts of Jerusalem, revealed the remains of a large, planned Roman and Byzantine periods settlement. The site is identified with a settlement established by Vespasian after the Great (First) Jewish Revolt (AD 70) for 800 Roman veterans, which was later known as Colonia. The first phase of this settlement, attributed to the veterans' occupation, apparently lasted until about AD 130, and included a barracks-like insula which was divided into three nearly-identical units, a colonnaded street, and an affluent peristyle residential building. It may be concluded that the settlement was planned and built in two major stages. The insula was built in the earliest stage, shortly after AD 70, as a structure which was probably occupied by a military unit that controlled the nearby road and the local springs. The second construction stage included the colonnade street and the peristyle building, forming the civil or semi-civil sections of the settlement where the veteran community may have lived.*

**KEYWORDS:** MOZA; MIDDLE ROMAN PERIOD; ROMAN ARMY; VETERANS' SETTLEMENT; JEWISH REVOLTS.

## Introduction

According to Josephus, after the Great Jewish Revolt Vespasian established a settlement for 800 Roman veterans in a place called Emmaus ('hot springs'), 30 *stades* (c. 5.5km) from Jerusalem, which is commonly identified with the site of Moza (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The site's name appears in later sources as Moza, meaning 'spring',<sup>2</sup> and as Colonia, which derived from the military identity of the original Roman settlement.<sup>3</sup> This latter name was preserved in the Arab village of *Qalunya*, which stood at the spot until 1948.

The most recent (2015–2020) excavations at Moza (see below) support the identification of the site with the Roman veterans' settlement. Given the meager information about this settlement in historical sources, the excavations provide important details about its architectural components, inhabitants, and material culture. This article aims to present the results of the excavations and draw through them a preliminary structural plan of the veterans' settlement, which the historical sources failed to provide.

## Description of the Excavations and the Dimensions of the Settlement

The site of Moza is located 5km to the west of modern Jerusalem and c. 0.5km from Tel Moza. It occupies a westward sloping spur near the linking point between Nahal Soreq and Nahal Arza, a small spring that flows toward it from the west. The site was occupied since the Paleolithic era into the present. Its attraction derived from its fertile grounds and ample water sources in the immediate surroundings, two of which ('*Ein Moza* and '*Ein Arza*') are still active (Roskin *et al.* 2022). Another

advantage is the proximity to the road between the coast and Jerusalem (Fischer, Isaac and Roll 1996: 222; Rubin 2020).

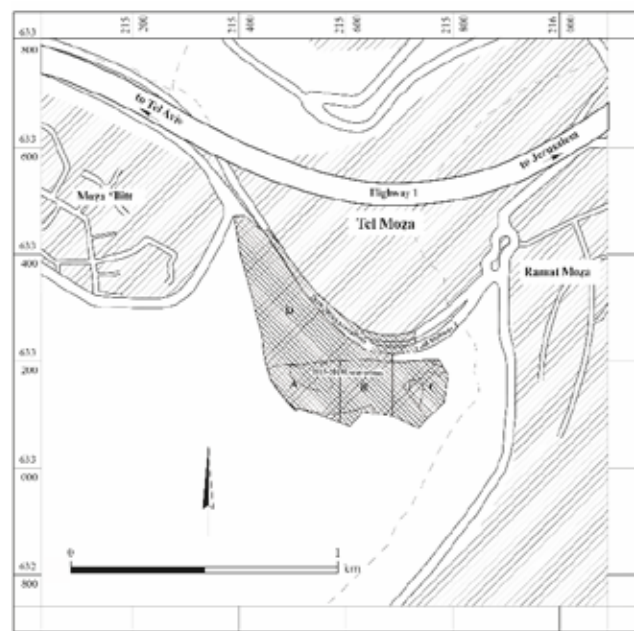


Figure 1. Location map.

Probing and salvage archaeological excavations took place at the site, prior to the paving of a road and intersection that is to link between Moza junction and the western parts of Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> Excavations in areas B1 and D9 between 2018–2019 directed by Hamoudi Khalaily and Ya'aov Vardi exposed remains of a settlement from the Middle Roman, Late Roman and Byzantine periods (Bar-Nathan *et al.* 2020). Additional parts of the same Roman and

<sup>1</sup> Josephus. *BJ* 7: 216–217; see Fischer, Isaac and Roll 1996: 222–224; Isaac 1990: 428; Tsafir, Di Segni and Green 1994: 105; Ein Mor *et al.* 2019: 56; Weksler-Bdolah 2020: 186.

<sup>2</sup> Mishna *Suk* 4, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Jerusalem Talmud *Suk* 4, 3–54b; Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Sabas* 67; see Di Segni 2005: 199.

<sup>4</sup> For the results of the excavations and related finds see Khalaily *et al.* 2020.



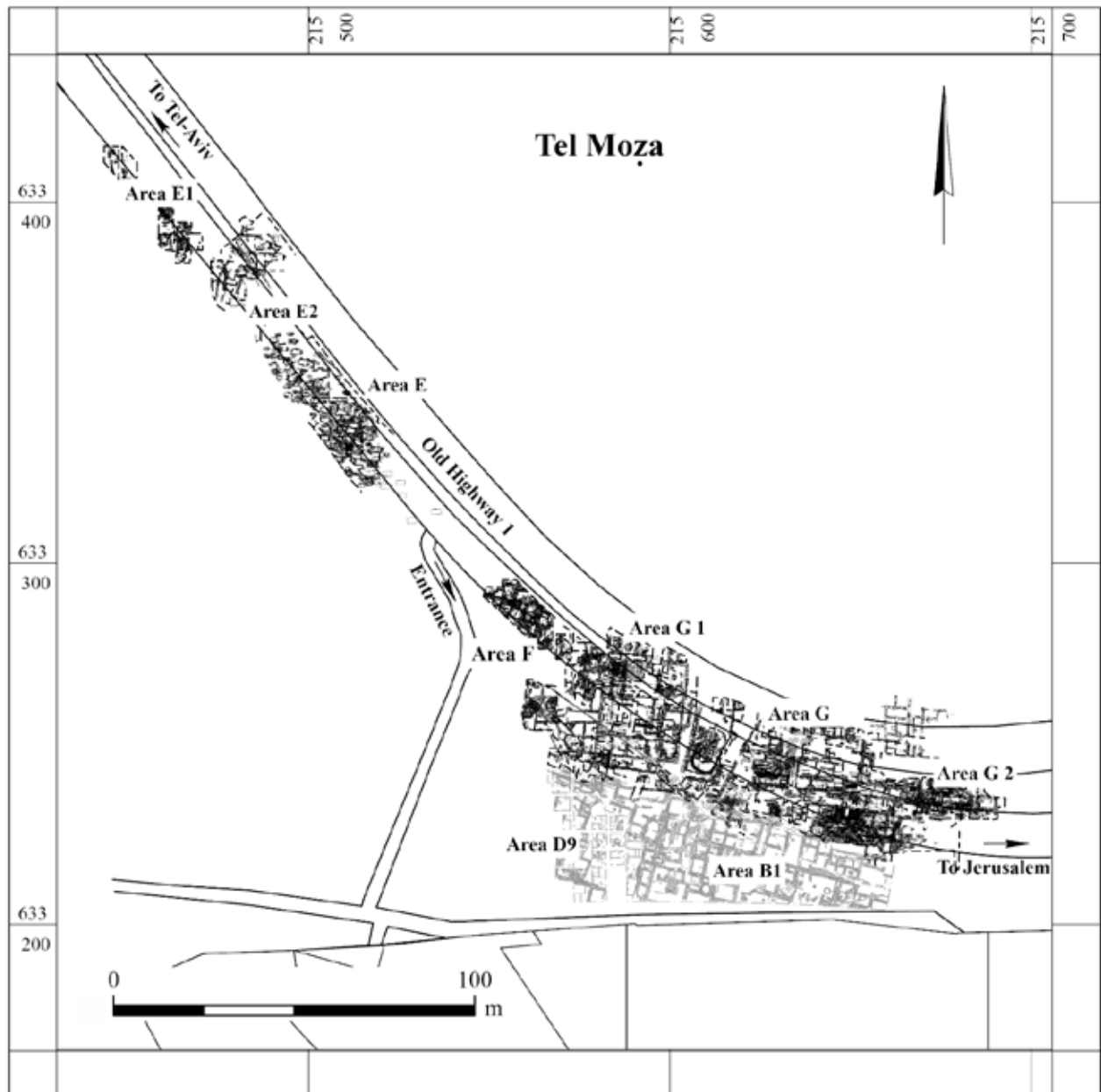


Figure 2. General plan of the excavations.

Byzantine settlement were discovered in excavations between 2019–2020 to the north of areas B1 and D9 under the direction of Anna Eirich-Rose and Uzi ‘Ad (areas F, G, G1 and G2).

The excavations exposed over eight dunams of the Roman settlement, whose first phase of existence dated between the 1st and the 2nd century AD (c. 70–130). Yet the settlement was much larger. Its western and eastern limits were detected in the 2019–2020 excavations (‘Ad and Eirich-Rose 2021). Based on them, its east-west dimensions may be estimated at 170m. The southern boundary could be determined upon the results of the 2018–2019 excavations (Khalaily and Vardi 2020; Bar-Nathan *et al.* 2020), but the northern limits remain unknown. A calculation of the excavated area and the grounds where massive construction from the Middle Roman period was exposed in trial trenches leads us to the conclusion that the settlement was over 16 dunams in size,

but probably even larger, between 20–25 dunams (Figure 2). Remains from this period in areas to the south and west include mainly field walls (retaining walls, terraces and plot divisions), tombs and plastered installations (for a preliminary report, see ‘Ad and Eirich-Rose 2021). This article will focus on remains from the Middle Roman period.

#### Settlement Plan in the Middle Roman Period

Three obstacles needed to be overcome in order to produce a stable basis for the construction of the Roman period settlement: the west-east and south-north declines, the instability of the ground and prevention of flooding by runoff water and groundwater beds. Prehistorical construction compromised the natural drainage (Roskin *et al.* 2022). From the onset, before the construction of the actual Roman settlement begun, a network of perpendicular walls with a space of between 3–4.5m



Figure 3. General aerial view of Area BI, looking north. The remains of the Middle Roman phase (foundation walls) are highlighted.



Figure 4. Plan of the insula B, colonnade street and peristyle building.

between them was erected (Figure 3). The walls at the southern areas were founded over the bedrock, where it was relatively shallow. At the eastern areas the walls were built over earlier structures and at the north, where the bedrock was deep (excavations more than 5m deep failed to meet it), they were built over Neolithic, Chalcolithic and Bronze Age remains. An inconsistency between the orientation of the foundation walls should be noted: the general direction of the walls in the northern parts (Areas G, G1 and G2) is north-south, while the orientation of the walls at the southern part (Area B) is northeast-southwest

(Figure 4). Some of the foundation walls were exposed to a length of 50m and preserved to a height of over 2.5m. They reached between 0.9–1.3m in width. Builders used field and dressed stones and incorporated architectural elements such as limestone columns in secondary use. To avoid obstruction of subsoil water flow, no cementing materials were used. The boxes formed from the construction of the crisscrossing walls were filled with pebbles, small and medium field stones, and non-clayish soil, which in the northern parts was rich with pottery. Such fill allowed free subsoil flow and the construction of

a stable foundation bed above – a podium for the floors of the structures. It should be noted that no architectural elements were incorporated in construction at the southern part of the settlement and the fill in the boxes contained no pottery. As these walls were used as foundations for the settlement's structures, we may assume that it was planned and built upon an orthogonal plan with sub-divisions into insulae, possibly in two phases. A street was paved through the center of the settlement. Insulae were erected along both its sides.

### The Area B Insula

The partial remains of a large architectural complex were discovered between 10–20m to the south of the street. The complex, of which c. 25 × 75m were unearthed, was oriented southeast-northwest (see Figures 3, 4). This complex functioned as an independent *insula*. The surface in this part of the site slopes down from west to east, which, along with extant earlier remains dictated the preparation above of a podium-like surface that served as a foundation to the above-mentioned building although the orientation is slightly different (Bar-Nathan *et al.* 2020: 353–356).

The complex/insula included at least three adjacent units, each composed of a central courtyard surrounded by rooms. As the southern and eastern parts of the complex lay mostly outside the excavation limits, a full reconstruction of the plan is not feasible at this stage. To the complex's western unit are attributed a central courtyard (Courtyard I; c. 14 × 9.5m) and at least nine rooms of various sizes that delimited it to the north, west and east. The unit's western wall was also the insula's western external wall. No Roman-period remains were found to the west of it. Part of a pavement was preserved within the central courtyard. It was made of irregular stone slabs laid over a foundation of crushed limestone. Beaten-earth floors were discerned in some of the rooms around the courtyard.

To the central unit is attributed a central courtyard (Courtyard II) c. 10m wide. The courtyard was probably of similar size as Courtyard I, but only a length of 9m was excavated. Nine rooms were unearthed to the north, west and east of the courtyard. No remains of floors were detected in the central unit, as they were completely destroyed by later construction and modern infrastructure work.

The eastern unit was severely damaged by modern infrastructure, although it appears to be similar to the western and central units, with a courtyard (Courtyard III) surrounded by rooms. Three rooms were unearthed all in its northeastern part.

The northern peripheral wall of the complex (W8621) was mostly founded upon bedrock. Remains of a built channel were found to the northwest of the complex. The channel was plastered on the interior and covered with stone slabs.



Figure 5. Inscribed military bread stamp. The inscription reads: *Centuria of Donatus/Optatus/Rogatus, (work) of Servilius (or of [praenomen?] Servilius).*

The destruction of the insula is evidenced by wall debris in several locations. These contexts, as well as the fills that were laid in order to level the area during the construction of the next phase, contained numerous finds, including coins and military artifacts. Among the coins are a Nabataean mint of Rabbel II (AD 70–106) and two *Iudaea Capta* issues of Titus. The military objects include an iron spearhead, a military bread stamp with the name of a military baker (Figure 5), the ownership tag of a soldier and a Celtic fibula. The possibility that the same *centuria* appears in the tag and in the bread, stamp cannot be excluded.<sup>5</sup>

### The Colonnaded Street

An 80m long, 7.20m wide colonnaded street was discovered at the center of the settlement. It was oriented east-west with a moderate incline westward (Figures 4, 6). Its floor was made of layers of packed chalk and plaster. Along its southern part was a narrow slab-covered drainage channel. Its floor was partly paved with stones and partly with plaster. To the north of the street was a c. 2.4m wide sidewalk. A column-bearing stylobate stood between the street and the sidewalk. A few limestone column bases remained in place. The distance between the columns in the western part was c. 2.5m and 1.1–1.9m in the eastern part, which underwent changes and repairs during the period. It should be stressed that each of the bases and capitals is different, thus in secondary use even in this phase. Their origins are unknown. A line of rooms,

<sup>5</sup> For these and other finds see in detail Bar-Nathan *et al.* 2020: 364–368.





*Figure 6. General aerial view of the colonnade street, looking west.*

possibly dwellings or shops, was discovered to the north of the sidewalk. A plastered channel for water supply was exposed next to the wall that delimits the rooms to the south. A terracotta pipe was laid within it in a secondary phase. Intersections between the street and alleys reaching from the north may be proposed in two spots.

#### **The Peristyle Structure in Area G1**

An affluent residence planned as a square peristyle structure (over  $30 \times 30$ m) was exposed to the northwest of the street. It comprises nearly a third of the settlement's excavated area in the 2019–2020 (see Figure 4). The structure was built in the Middle Roman period and was used until the 4th century AD. Two Middle Roman phases were discerned. Partial damage during the Late Roman



period in the northern part, which also exceeds the limits of the excavation, and additional damage to the eastern and western parts in the Byzantine period preclude a determination of the full size of the complex. A courtyard (10.5 × 7.2m) surrounded from its four sides by a portico (c. 2.5m wide) was exposed at the center of the structure. No floor was discovered, other than a light-colored surface topped with reddish fill and soil. This surface was c. 70cm lower than the floors of the surrounding portico, thus may have served as a garden. A channel along the southern wall near the southeastern corner of the courtyard drained it into the main drain channel (see below). A stylobate stood between the courtyard and the portico. Its line of columns supported the portico's roof. Only a few pedestals made of large limestone blocks remained. Based on the remains, there were pedestals in the corners, with three columns between them in the northern and southern segments and two columns between the pedestals in the eastern and western segments. The northern portico had an *opus sectile* floor, of which only negatives in the foundation bed bear witness. The other porticos were paved with mosaics, of which only the foundation beds remained. Many mosaic stones were found under the foundation bed, some of which colored.

At the center of the northern part of the structure was a tessellated mosaic-paved room (5.7 × 4.7m), showing hexagonal motifs in red, white and black within a double black frame (Figure 7). This example reminds of similar mosaics known as *opus sectile*-like. It appears to have been a lounge – a luxury hosting room. The mosaic was mended numerous times showing a varying quality of workmanship, which attest to prolonged utilization. From the east, the mosaic meets a rectangular pool 1.3m deep, into which four narrow steps descended from the western edge. The pool's floor and the top of the wall/bench surrounding it were covered with mosaics made of small white stones. A drain channel in the bottom of the southern frame served the pool. The channel was set in a massive

wall (2.3m wide), of which the southern face was built of large, dressed blocks and a core of cement mixed with fieldstones. The channel was covered with rectangular stone slabs. It stretched 17m to the east, along the wall, where it met a similar channel reaching through the same wall from the north. Part of a plaster floor was exposed 5m to the west of the pool. It was slightly higher than the bench surrounding the pool. This may have remained of a reservoir that received water from the aqueduct, of which parts were discovered 120m uphill to the west, or from some other source, before releasing it to the pool. The size of the reservoir is unknown, as are the means by which it supplied water to the pool to the east, as it was destroyed during a secondary phase of construction. Passage between the lounge and the steps to the pool was probably through a corridor to the north.

A large room was exposed to the east of the lounge. Its floor was 90cm lower. The floor and walls of the room were coated with a thick layer of plaster. Only solid foundations were left of the walls that set the northern limit of the room and separated it from the lounge. The room's function is unclear. It may have served as a pool or some other element of a bathhouse that appears to have stood in this area (see below). Due to olive press installations that were constructed during the Late Roman and Byzantine periods to the north of the lounge and the pool with steps, we do not know what stood there in the Middle Roman period.

The foundations of two or three walls were exposed in the western segment, which was severely damaged by later construction. The walls link from the west to the wall separating the segment from the western portico. In the northern part of the segment was a circular plastered pit with steps reaching it from the north. In its floor was a sump. The pit seems to have been a cistern under one of the rooms of the structure. Four or five rooms can be reconstructed in the southern segment. Along their front, to the south of the structure, was probably the sidewalk of



Figure 7. The mosaic floor from phase 1 of the peristyle building and the pool of phase 2, looking west.

the street exposed to the east (see above). In the eastern segment, which like the western segment was badly damaged by later construction, were the foundations of the wall separating between the northern and eastern parts and the wall between the segment and the eastern portico. Yet based on the remains and the walls from the later phases, we may assume that in this phase the segment had four rooms. About one meter under the eastern portico's floor and under the eastern part of the northern segment was a large drain channel (1m deep and 70cm wide), which extended southwards beyond the limits of the building. The northern end of the channel and what it was aimed to drain remain unknown.

During the second phase, which was identified only in the northern segment, a plastered reservoir was built to the west of the pool with the steps (see Figure 4). It was roughly square in shape and stored water reaching it from the west. In the center of the eastern frame of the collection pool was a puncture (sealed in a later phase), through which the water flowed into a horseshoe-shaped (apsidal) installation (see Figure 7). The installation was paved with terracotta tiles, which replaced the mosaic from the first phase, which was mostly destroyed. From this horseshoe installation the water flowed to a pool or cistern that was paved with terracotta tiles laid over the mosaic of the first phase. The lowest step was cancelled as a result of the raising of the floor level. A wall was built over the colored mosaic floor to the east of the pool. This wall separated between the pool and the room (lounge). The edges of the pool were coated in this phase with a grey plaster, the same which was used for repairing the mosaic floors surrounding the pool. The construction of the collection cistern blocked the passage from the first phase at the north, between the lounge and the pool.

The luxurious character of the structure is reflected in the fragments of stucco and fresco that originally adorned the walls of the first and second phases. The fragments were discovered in the fill under the floors of the Late Roman period in the eastern part of the northern segments and the courtyard. Many fragments of square tubuli were found with them, attesting to a bathhouse in the close vicinity. Structures with luxurious rooms whose walls were decorated with fresco also stood in the eastern part of the settlement, as evidenced by the very large quantities of fresco fragments found under the floor of the street in the eastern end of the excavation, as part of the foundation bed of the Late Roman Street (Figure 8), and in the adjacent rooms to the north and in Eisenberg's excavation from 1973, approximately 5m to the north.

The peristyle structure is very important to the understanding of the development of this architectural style in the Land of Israel. The structure belongs to a non-urban group of residences from the Roman period which incorporate a full peristyle surrounded by rooms on all sides. There were no examples of similar peristyle structures in the Land of Israel until the discovery of the structure under discussion. A reminiscent building was probably exposed at 'Ein Zeituna in Wadi 'Ara, and later examples are known from 'Ein Ya'al and Ramat Rahel.

No signs of destruction were detected in the colonnaded street, the structures to the north of it and in the peristyle residence, contrasting with the insula in Area B1, thus their abandonment was done orderly. Based on the extensive utilization of Middle Roman walls and foundations during the Late Roman period it appears the occupation gap was not significant. It could be assumed that the Middle Roman structures stood in a state of dereliction as resettlement took place in the Late Roman phase.

## Discussion and Conclusion

As already noted, (Bar-Nathan *et al.* 2020), the results of the recent excavations at Moza support the identification of the site— and more accurately its earliest Roman-period phase – with the veterans' settlement established by Vespasian after the Great Jewish Revolt. The archaeological evidence indicates that the settlement's construction was probably carried out by engineers of the Tenth Legion and involved substantial investment of resources and significant pre-planning. At this stage of research and based on the differences in orientation between the southern and northern parts of the settlement (i.e., the insula B and the colonnade street and peristyle building, respectively), it may be concluded that the settlement was planned and built in two major stages. Insula B was built in the earliest stage, shortly after AD 70, as a barracks-like structure which was probably occupied by a military unit that controlled the nearby road and the local springs. The second construction stage included the colonnade street and the peristyle building, forming the civil or semi-civil sections of the settlement where the veteran community may have lived. In any rate, the similarity between the construction method of the foundations in the various parts of the settlement indicates a degree of consistency. It is possible that the two stages were planned by the same engineers.

The colonnade street probably functioned as an inner traffic line and commercial center (given the shops which were apparently located on both its sides). It also connected the settlement with the main road leading to



Figure 8. Fresco fragments found under the floor.



Jerusalem. It may have actually been part of the road,<sup>6</sup> although Fischer believes that that road passed to the south of the Ḥalilim Ridge (Fischer, Isaac and Roll 1996: 225–229). The affluent peristyle building was likely owned by a veteran officer of high rank. Additional structures including simpler dwellings, a bathhouse and secondary streets or alleys must have also been built nearby. The settlement's economy was based on agriculture production and perhaps on road services to travelers.

The results of the present excavations suggest that the military unit which was stationed at Moza due to its strategic location, functioned as part of an external defensive array which surrounded the city of Jerusalem – together with the unit stationed at Abu Ghosh.<sup>7</sup> During the discussed period Jerusalem and its vicinity, which formed the newly-established toparchy of Orine, included three major entities – the Tenth Legion in the city itself, a Jewish civic settlement in Shu'afat and a Roman veteran settlement in Moza/Colonia (Bar Nathan and Sklar 2007; Bar-Nathan and Bijovsky 2018; Cotton 2007; Ecker 2016: 86–87; Weksler-Bdolah 2020: 169). We suggest that sometime before or after the outbreak of the Bar Kokkba Revolt, apparently following the establishment of Aelia Capitolina, the local military unit was called up to join the forces that fought the rebels.<sup>8</sup> At this stage the veterans and their families abandoned the settlement, willingly or forcefully. The reoccupation of the site probably occurred only after the revolt was oppressed, either by some of the former inhabitants and/or their descendants or by a new non-Jewish population. As already noted, (Bar-Nathan *et al.* 2020: 373–374), it is difficult to evaluate the time that elapsed between the end of the first settlement phase and the beginning of the following. The new settlement was evidently of a different, more rustic nature, and appears to have become part of the agricultural hinterland of Aelia Capitolina well into the following centuries.

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<sup>6</sup> See Rubin 2020: 334–335.

<sup>7</sup> See Ein Mor *et al.* 2019, with references. Examples of military units in close proximity to veteran settlements that not colonial colony have been found in Carthage's frontier see Ferchiou 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Isaac (1990: 313), who discussed the military function of Roman veteran colonies, cites other scholarly opinions which according to him claimed that 'the veterans were not so much an actual defence force as a strategic reserve to be called up in case of emergency. Their military function, in other words, would remain dormant in peace-time and they would play a military role only in times of war. Also, it was short-lived.

As the veterans grew old and died the settlement would cease to be a garrison colony, for the next generation would not be born as veterans'. Isaac himself, though, argues that 'Roman colonies [...] were not meant to defend the empire at times of large-scale hostilities, and they did not control large areas or tribes or routes beyond their territorial boundaries' (1990: 313). Although Moza was not a true colony, since it was not a city (Bar-Nathan *et al.* 2020: 351), the above-mentioned hypothesis suggests that the local military unit, perhaps backed-up by veterans, participated in the war against the Jewish rebels.

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# Ramat Bet Shemesh Site 94/10: First Steps for the Understanding of Social Space Organization in Rural Hasmonean Shephelah – a View from Naḥal Yarmut

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*This article presents the results of salvage excavation on the Hasmonean Site 91/10 in the vicinity of Naḥal Yarmut in the framework of the long duration project of Ramat Bet Shemesh. The article analyzed the architectural plan of a domestic complex (dated to late 2nd - first half of the 1st century BC) from a social-architectural perspective to pinpoint the organization of the space inside the building. To do so, we implemented Hillier and Hanson's space syntax theory, known as access analysis. The complex, composed of various courtyards, rooms, and cellars, also included wine presses installations and storage rooms. The access analysis results show a complex hierarchic system of relations between the spaces concerning privacy and public areas. We suggest using this method which adds a new perspective to the perception of the social organization of the Hasmonean rural society in the Shephelah.*

KEYWORDS: SHEPHELAH; RAMAT BET SHEMESH; NAHAL YARMUT; HASMONEAN PERIOD; RURAL SETTLEMENT; DOMESTIC SPACE; SPACE SYNTAX THEORY; SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF SPACE.

## Introduction

During the last decades, Ramat Bet Shemesh was extensively excavated due to a vast enlargement of the city of Bet Shemesh in the heart of the Shephelah. Surveys and hundreds of salvage excavations shed new light on the settlement history of the area (see, e.g., Dagan 2010; Dagan 2011; Khalaily 1996; Lipschits *et al.* 2014; Meir and Lipschits 2017; Sandhaus 2021; Sandhaus and Kreimerman 2017; Sandhaus 2018; Shalom and Lipschits 2020).

This paper, warmly dedicated to our friend and colleague Gabriel Mazar, aims to get a glimpse of the Hasmonean occupation (late 2nd – first half of 1st century BC) in the *Shephelah* area, particularly in the vicinity of Naḥal Yarmut. To do so, we focus our analysis on site 94/10 in the northern bank of Naḥal Yarmut (Figure 1; map ref. 14997/12417; Figs. 1; 2; Milevski 1998d).<sup>1</sup>

We study the Naḥal Yarmut complex from a social perspective to establish a first step for understanding the social organization of the Hasmonean rural society. This analysis utilizes the architectural plan of the house to pinpoint the management of the space inside a domestic complex. To do so, we implemented Hillier and Hanson's (1984) space syntax theory, known as access analysis.

## Methodological Framework

Access analysis' technique developed for architects and adopted by anthropologists (e.g., Hanson 1998; Hillier 1996; Hillier and Hanson 1984) is one of the analytical tools available to determine spatial complexity and reconstruct the relationships among entrances, gateways, and different spaces. It acknowledges the importance of spatial organization as an expression of cultural and social traits. People classify and control relationships by defining different spaces; thus, architectural features mark transitions between dimensions, such as insider/outsider, private/public, sacred/profane, elite/commoner, male/female, and initiated/uninitiated, activity areas, and more. Many archaeologists have adopted access analysis to interpret different sites (e.g., Faust 2006; Grahame 2000; Gadot and Yassar-Landau 2006; Gilboa, Sharon and Zorn 2018; Parker Pearson and Richards 1994: 5, 24; Regev 2009).

The method follows four steps: 1) identifying convex spaces (rooms) and connections between them (doorways); 2) the representation of spaces as nodes and connections as lines. 3) This is translated into a diagram that results in an abstract plan model. 4) Last, certain properties of the house, such as grades of integration versus segregation, and distributedness of the plan, are highlighted in consideration of the graph (Hillier and Hanson 1984: 147–155).

<sup>1</sup> The work was directed by I. Milevski, assisted by Y. Bueller, A. Metens, A. Tischler and J. Yas (area supervisors), R. Nicolescu, Y. Stark and T. Kornfeld (surveyors), G. Bijovsky (numismatic), Y. Gorin-Rosen (glass), E. Barzilay (geomorphologist) and A. Ganon (administration). The restoration of the pottery vessels was carried out by S. Blankstein and L. Margulis. Final plans were drawn by N. Zack; drawings of

pottery vessels were done by L. Poliakov and I. Lidsky. We are indebted to all of them. The interpretations presented in this paper are part of the D. Sandhaus' PhD dissertation. The authors wish to express their thanks to M. Hershkovitz O. Abd Rabu and Y. Rapuano for offering valuable comments on some of the pottery types. To.



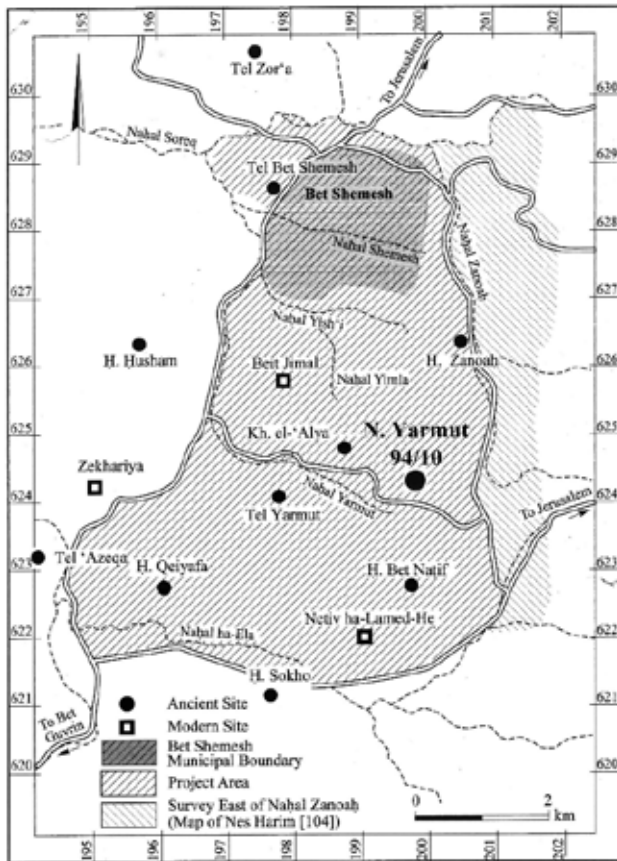


Figure 1. Nahal Yarmut, site 94/10 (based on Ramat Bet Shemesh project survey map).

Critical views of the method infer that access analysis in archaeology is of little use. Most of the numerical indices depend on the complete knowledge of the plan of the house. Even in the best cases, upper stories' plans remain conjectural and could produce different access graphs. The same can be said for extra furniture and screen that can divide spaces (Cutting 2003). Others noted that the method ignores the different contexts of each unit and its specific meaning (Parker, Pearson, and Richards 1994: 30). Regardless, we consider access analysis as a relevant thinking tool, and it is in this sense it is used here.

### The Archaeological Evidence

From the geological point of view, site 94/10 is located within the Zorah formation north of Nahal Yarmut (Geological Survey 1985; Barzilai 2011). Topographically, the site is located on two broad intermediate terraces of the slope, approximately 405m asl, between the wadi's bank and the hill summit. In the eastern part of the site, an alleyway runs SW–NE rise up the slope. This alleyway served as a road connecting Beit Natif with Khirbet Zanoah (see Figure 1).

Nearby several sites were excavated (Abd Rabu 1998; 'Adawi 2015; Billig 2010; Brand 1998; Dagan 2011; Dagan 2010: 43–44; 235–248; Dagan 1998; Dagan 1996; Dagan and Avganim 1998; Dagan and Barash 1998; Dagan *et al.* 1998; Eisenberg and Sklar 2000; Greenwald 2015a; b; Haber 2019; Haber and Melman 2018; Kalailly 1996; Marco 2017; Milevski 1998a–d; Mizrahi 2015; Shalev 2015; Paz 2016; Storchan 2013; Storchan 2012; Tzur 2019; Zilberbod 2013a; b). The uncovered remains range from the Neolithic period to the modern era and include buildings, installations, tombs, caves, an Iron Age farm, a Roman bathhouse and agricultural terraces.

Site 94/10 includes the remains of a living complex —The Dwelling Complex (Figures 2–6, 9–10)— and a Wine Press Complex (Figures 2, 7) dated to the late 2nd – 1st centuries BC. Buildings dating to the Late Roman and Byzantine Periods are out of the scope of this article. Table 1 summarized the information of the immediately previous and following occupational layers. Thus, we can track the transformations and processes in the occupational pattern of the site.

Two buildings about 20m apart were dug in area A and parts of area E. The area between the buildings was not excavated.<sup>2</sup> While the walls and bedrock quarries of the northern complex were visible, the southern was hard to

STRATA	DESCRIPTION	DESTRUCTION/ABANDONMENT	DATE
I	Subterranean cisterns in the area of the Dwelling Complex (94/10)	Abandoned	Mid-1st BC to c. 1st AD
II	Dwelling Complex, olive press, wine press (94/10)	The building ceased to exist as such. The only spots in use are the subterranean cisterns	Late 2nd–first half of c. 1st BC
III	Pottery Sherds	?	Late c. 4th–early 3rd BC

Table 1. Combined stratigraphy sequence of relevant strata in Nahal Yarmut sites 94/10 and 94/29.

<sup>2</sup> The opening of the squares was decided according to the priority given to the tracts programmed to be destroyed by the building of the interior

streets of the future neighborhood. For this reason, the sector between the complexes was not dug.

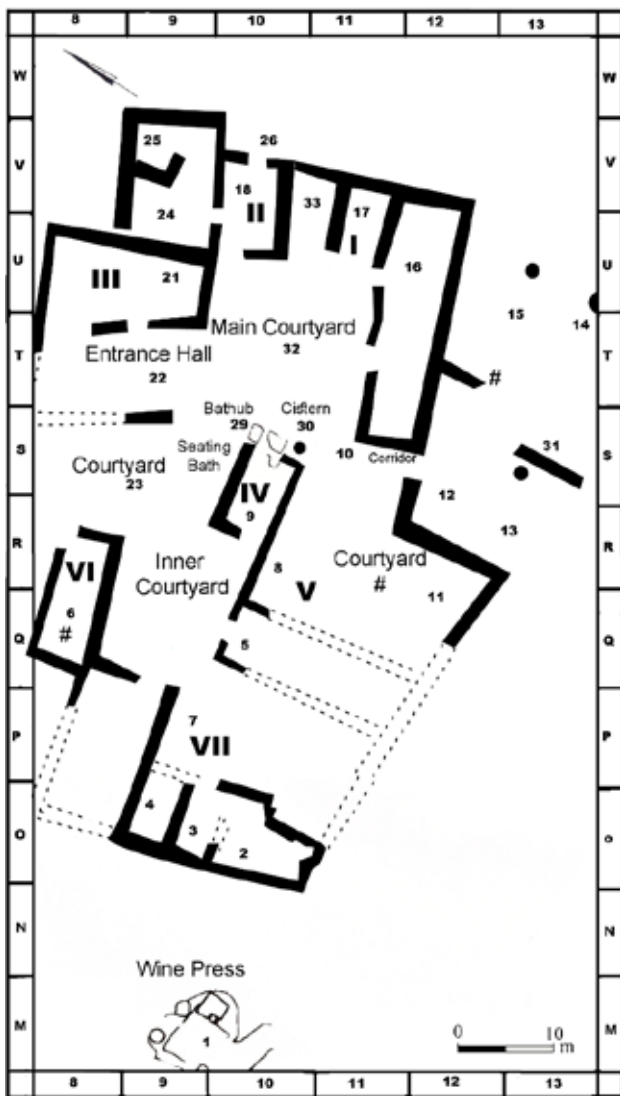


Figure 2. Nahal Yarmut, the dwelling complex and the wine press complex, schematic Plan (courtesy of IAA).

see because a stone heap covered it. The excavations' results show that, in general, each of these complexes belongs to different periods and are distinct. The Domestic Dwelling found in the north was associated with the Hasmonean occupation.

### The Dwelling Complex

The Dwelling Complex (Figures 2–3) consists of the building's foundations (at least 30 × 40m), partly built of hewn stones and partially cut into the rock. The complex includes seven dwelling units, orientated E–W (see Figure 2). Several installations were found within these units. Besides, a wine press complex (Figures 2, 8) was uncovered west of the complex. Since the complex was not completely excavated, it is impossible to draw its limits.

The preservation state is poor due to late agricultural activities; the walls were preserved to a height of one or two courses. Several doorways were identified between



Figure 3. Nahal Yarmut, the dwelling complex excavation area, looking west.



Figure 4. Nahal Yarmut, dwelling complex, doorways between rooms (marked with the arrow) and stone make-ups.



Figure 5. Nahal Yarmut, dwelling complex, stone make-ups.

the rooms (Figure 4). The floors are of packed earth or had a stone make-up laid below a plaster layer (Figure 5).

The complex was excavated to a depth of 40cm–1m. The stratigraphical soil layers include, in general, dark brown topsoil with fine gravel, a variated light brown fill below, and a yellowish to reddish-brown fill above the bedrock. The architectural outline (see Figure 2) proposed in this work bears in mind three levels of evidence and





Figure 6. Naḥal Yarmut, dwelling complex, unit II, subterranean wine press, looking south.



Figure 7. Naḥal Yarmut, dwelling complex, unit IV, detail of doorway, cistern and bathtub looking west (IAA courtesy).

reconstruction: a) existing foundation walls; b) reconstructed walls and entrances following the existing quarried lines into the bedrock, and c) the reconstruction of units based on a and b.

Two entrances to the building were identified. The principal leads from the south to the central courtyard through two external courtyards and a corridor; the second leads from the west to Unit II (Figures 2, 6). Some of the units are preceded by courtyards (Units III, V, VI, VII; others are entered directly through the central courtyard; see Figure 2).

The area to the south of the complex was partly excavated. The built remains include an ample space that seems to function as the entrance to the whole building. To the east, cup-marks were carved in the bedrocks. The finds in these areas include potsherds from the Hasmonean period and a coin dated to the 3rd – 2nd centuries BC.

Unit I is composed of a series of rooms (Figure 2: 16, 17, 33) set in the south-eastern part of the house that is accessed directly from the main courtyard. The southern room was entered through a double entrance. Pottery dating to the Hasmonean period was found with glass



Figure 8. Naḥal Yarmut, wine press I, looking west.

fragments dated to the Hasmonean and Early Roman periods.

Unit II comprises an ante-room, a subterranean wine press, and two additional rooms (Figure 2: 18, 24). The winepress access was through four stairs on the eastern edge of the ante-room, and a socket was set on the upper step. The unit was c. 4m wide, but its length is unknown. The maximum depth was c. 90cm. It was roughly carved in the rock, and the plaster remains were difficult visible.

A wall, W113, was constructed upon the fill, which covers the installation's bedrock. The pottery sherds found within this fill is dated to the Hellenistic period, while the fill attached to W113 is dated to the Hellenistic and Early Roman period. Therefore, it is suggested that the underground unit was closed and subdivided into two unit's different units during this last period.

Unit III comprises two elongated rectangular spaces (Figure 2: 21, 22), north-south oriented. Some of the walls in this unit are relatively well preserved.

Unit IV, located to the west of the main courtyard, includes a rectangular room (Figure 2: 9) preceded by a bathtub (Figure 2: 28) ending in a seating bath and a cistern (Figure 2: 30). Quarried marks in the bedrock and a small wall segment defined the room, entered from the courtyard by an entrance in the western wall with two-door sockets on each side of the doorway. The cistern was bell-shaped, and small niches were found in each corner of the square opening. These niches were probably intended for wooden beams.

The cistern was sealed and previously thought to be abandoned before constructing the building (Milevski 1998d: 122). Nevertheless, the pottery found inside the cistern dates from the late 2nd century BC to the 1st century AD. Thus, it seems that the cistern was in use in both periods, at least until the latter of both. A natural opening to the south was found closed by medium stones.

The bathtub is located c. 50cm to the north of the cistern opening. It is oval, 70cm long, 45cm wide, and 30cm deep. A small seat for the bather was hewn in the western end of



the tub. It was covered with a light grey plaster. Remains of *tabun* were found east of the tub and the cistern (Figure 7).

Unit V includes an elongated courtyard flanked by a room to the west (Figure 2: 5, 8, 11). It was presumably entered through the long rectangular room. Room 5, oriented north-south, was paved with small stones; the walls were reconstructed from the quarried bedrock. Pottery from the Late Hellenistic period was found together with a Seleucid coin dated to the 3rd – 2nd century BC in the eastern part of the inner courtyard.

Unit VI is composed of two rectangular rooms (Figure 2: 6, 35) entered through the inner courtyard. The rooms are not directly connected, and its inclusion in one unit is conjectural.

Unit VII is formed by another courtyard that leads to three rooms. The rooms are defined mainly through reconstructed walls according to the quarried bedrock and poorly preserved stone walls. Two rooms are rectangular elongated, west-east oriented, while the third, located in the southern edge, is oriented north-south, has an L shape form, and has a niche carved in the south wall (Figure 2: 2–4, 8).

### The Wine Press Complex

A simple wine press excavated in the westernmost part of the excavation was cut in the *Nari* rock and cleared in the west of the complex near rooms 2–4. It comprised a treading floor (2.2 × 2.5m) connected to the collecting vat (1.1 × 1.2m, max. depth 1.2m) through a drainage channel (Figures 2, 8). The sides of the collecting vat were coated with thick grey plaster. While the installation was in use, several changes occurred in the vat's shape and the drainage channel's location. Two rock-cut cup-marks were exposed north of the trading floor. Attached to the wine press and within it, pottery from the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods was retrieved.

### The Pottery

The ceramics found in the Dwelling Complex are fragmentary, and they do not have an input on the function of the different rooms. Their importance resides in the chronological horizon they represent. However, it is worth noting that the forms include table serving, preparation, cooking and storage, and utility forms that show that the everyday set of activities common in domestic complexes was found (Figure 9).

The table serving forms include small hemispherical bowls (Figure 9: 1) and small saucers with in-folded rims (Figure 9: 2), jugs without-folded rims turned outwards, relatively wide neck, and one handle drawn from rim to shoulder (Figure 9: 3) and a small jug or juglet with a rim turned outwards (Figure 9: 4).

Large bowls made of coarse ware without-folded rims creating a kind of shelf are common in the Shephelah area, and they probably replaced earlier forms known from the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic periods. They might have served for graining purposes.

The cooking vessels include close cooking pots with globular bodies, out-flaring necks with simple rims or slightly cut in the interior (Figure 9: 6–9). Storage vessels include storage jars with collared rims (Figure 9: 10–12), jars with out-folded, out-flaring rims (Figure 9: 13), and storage jugs (Figure 9: 14). Vessels for personal use include juglets with cup-like mouths and globular bodies (Figure 9: 15). Lightening artifacts include lamps of the pinched rim type (Figure 9: 16) and a fragment of a *kernos* made of several pinched lamps (Figure 9: 17).

The pottery assemblage is typical of the late 2nd – first half of 1st century BC in the Central Hill, the Judean Desert, the Galilee, and the Shephelah. The pottery that characterized this period is locally made, with no imports. It is well known and published elsewhere (e.g., Bar-Nathan 2002; Berlin 2015; Geva 2003; Gevan and HersHKovitz 2006).

Pottery dating to the late 1st century BC to the 1st century AD was retrieved from particular spots in the underground Wine Press in Unit III and the bathtub and cistern in Unit IV (unillustrated). It included closed cooking pots with triangular shallow, grooved rims storage jars with low collared rims, ending at the lowest part of the neck. An undecorated example of a knife-pared-shaped nozzle was retrieved from the southern complex's surface. Early Roman pottery finding attached to features, which suffered changes from their original setting (as the winepress and the installation), indicates that these changes occurred during the Early Roman period.

One clay loom weight (Figure 9: 18) of the pyramidal type was found on the ground surface. It belongs to Shamir's (1996) type C. It is made of well-fired clay, and the perforation in the top of the loom weight is the shape of a double horizontal cone. The use of pyramidal loom weights in the country was common throughout the Hellenistic and early Roman periods. They disappeared at the end of the 1st century BC (Shamir 1996: 148).

Two coins retrieved from the complex dating to the Early Hellenistic period may be explained by their having been in circulation a long time after they were minted. Glass fragments dating to the Hellenistic and Early Roman Periods include three rims of cast bowls and two different free-blown rims.

### Discussion

According to Hirschfeld's definition, the dwelling complex is domestic (Hirschfeld 1995: 44 ff). However, it does not fit the typical courtyard house; instead, it is a complicated net of courtyards connecting and distributing the

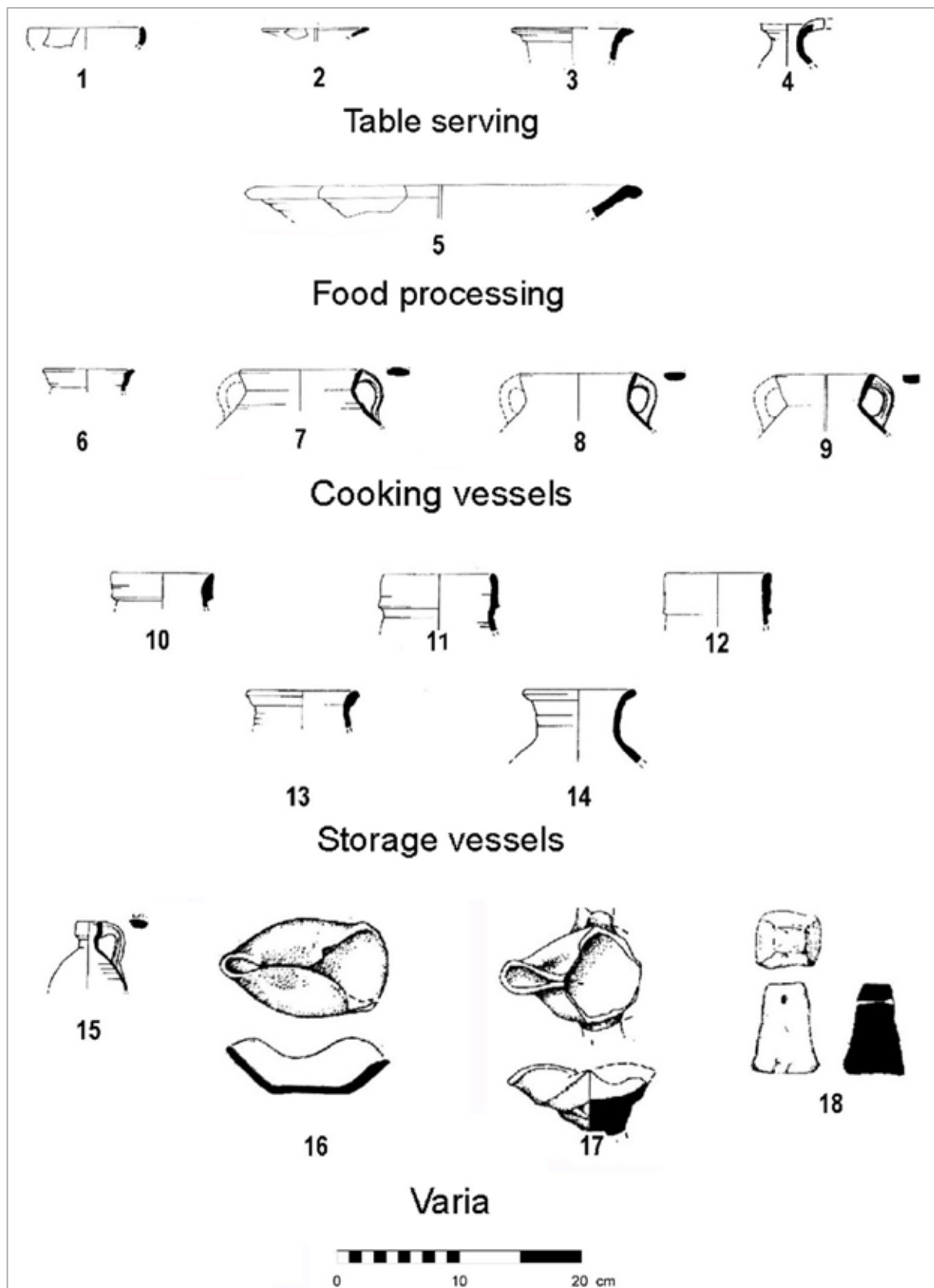


Figure 9. Nahal Yarmut: dwelling complex, household assemblage.

communication inside the complex, determining the different levels of privacy among the units and rooms (Figure 10).

The traffic flow through a house compels its use and sheds light on its users, as practical functions are seen as symbols representing meanings and ideologies (Gilboa, Sharon,

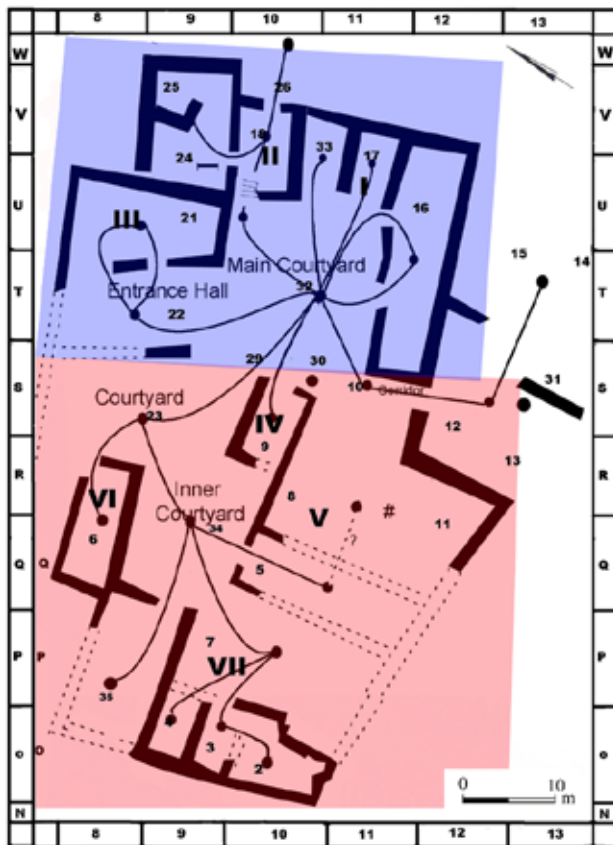


Figure 10. Nahal Yarmut, dwelling complex. access analysis plan and reconstruction of public and private areas.

and Zorn 2018; Kent 1990). Accessibility, or lack thereof in a space, relates to issues and values of privacy, containment, and control (Gilboa, Sharon, and Zorn 2018).

The more segmented the space using spatial partitions and restricted areas, the more a society is segregated and divided into hierarchies of gender, age, and specialized activities (Kent 1990, Regev 2009:87).

In the domestic dwelling of Site 94/10 at Ramat Bet Shemesh, an intricate communication system inside the complex was established by constructing courtyards and corridors connecting different units and wings as represented in the plan (see Figure 10) and justified diagram (see Figure 11). The entrance from outside is not direct; it is through an anteroom and a courtyard, which leads to a corridor. This arrangement shows a clear separation between the exterior and the interior.

Inside the complex, there are units, such as units I and II, entered directly through the central courtyard; others are preceded by other courtyards adding another set of spaces (III; V, VI, VII; see Figures 10–11), compelling the need to pass through another set of spaces to reach them. That means that in terms of privacy, there are different levels; units I and II are less private than the others. The justified diagram depicts the relationship between the units entered directly, drawn on the right and left sides, showing a more complex path. Thus, a more 'public space' can be defined in the eastern part of the complex or the left side of the

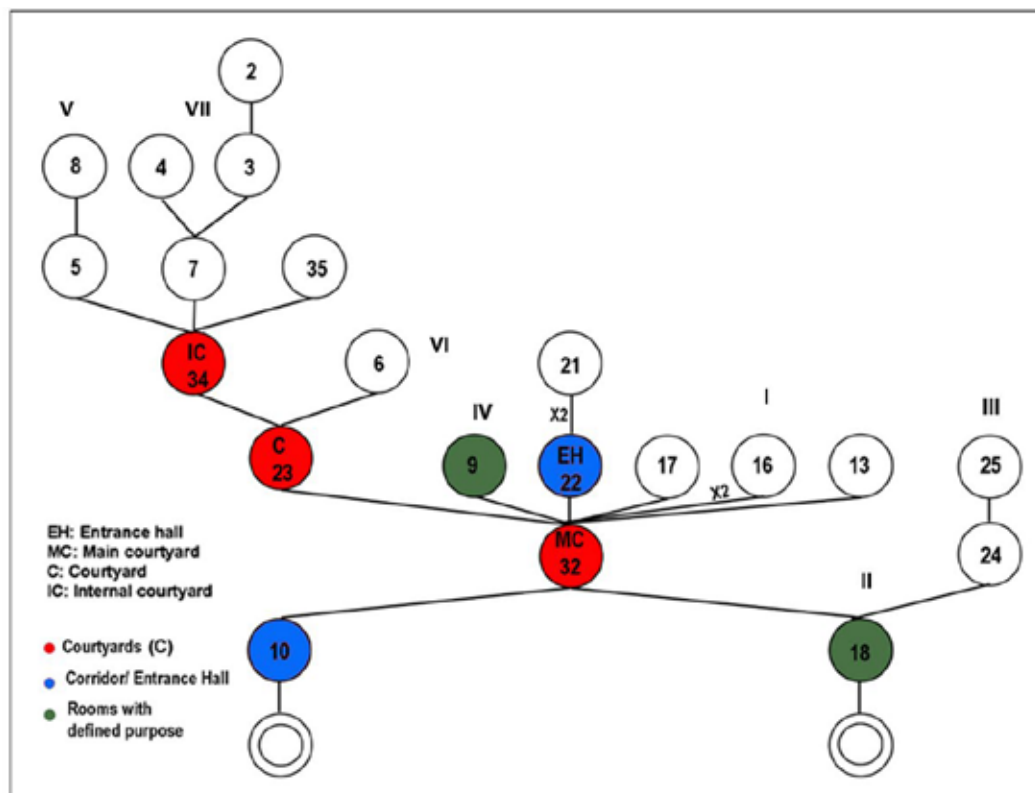


Figure 11. Nahal Yarmut, domestic dwelling complex, justified diagram.



diagram. The western part of the complex is a 'private space'.

The main courtyard 34 is the integrative focus of the house because almost every path between two other nodes must traverse it; node 2 in Unit VII is the most segregated room being the end node of a *cul-de-sac* (see Figures 10–11). The main courtyard has a substantial 'control' value because it has many dependent nodes whose occupants must pass through to access other parts of the house (Hillier and Hanson 1984: 109).

In the western part of the dwelling complex, a set of courtyards regulates the movement flow and defines different access levels. It depicts the more 'private space' where some units, such as Unit IV, with water facilities, is entered directly through the main courtyard and, according to the number of nodes required to get there, is more accessible than other units, such as Unit VII, which displays a more segregated area, as seen in the 'tail path' (a large number of nodes; Figure 11).

In general, the western private area shows five different levels of privacy (see Figures 10–11) that represent the relationships between the different spaces. The easier the access is, the fewer nodes one should pass through to get there, the more accessible and less segregated the space is. Following this premise, Unit IV, with the water facilities, is more accessible than Unit VII, which depicts the most private area.

Following are five levels of accessibility: The first, comprises units that are entered directly through the main courtyard - Unit IV; the second is represented by spaces that are entered from the main courtyard through courtyard 23, which are Unit VI and the inner courtyard 34; the third level is shown in spaces entered from the main courtyard, through courtyard 23, and then pass over courtyard 34, and these are Unit V, Unit VII and room 35; the fourth is represented in Units V and VII, where the inner rooms are accessed through the rooms from the previous level; and the fifth level is seen in Unit VII, room 2, which requires passing through all the previous levels.

## Conclusions

The dwelling complex from Ramat Bet Shemesh 94/10, north of Nahal Yarmut, shows a plan that represents an elaborated relationship pattern between the different spaces. The spatial analysis of the complex indicates that it was accessed from the exterior through two indirect entrances. A central courtyard, surrounded by groups of units on almost all sides, serves as the house's integrative focus and is probably the main source of light and ventilation. A clear separation between a more public space in the east and an intimate private part in the west was discerned and defined. Some units are arranged in an open setting, while others are placed in segregated sets of uni-linear connected spaces. In general, we can say that the dwelling complex depicts a highly distributed plan with

areas well integrated but with some units depicting a segregated character.

It seems that the complex was built during the Hasmonean period (late 2nd – first half of 1st century BC) as part of a serious plan that encompasses an extended regional settlement (Faust and Erlich 2008; Sandhaus 2021; Sandhaus 2018: 23–36). This regional settlement started at some point during the Hasmonean period, mainly in the area north to the 'Elah Valley, which was already part of the Judean district in the previous periods and extended to the south, previously in the Idumean district, by the second half of the 1st century AD, during Herod's reign (Sandhaus 2018: 23–36; 2021).

The erection of large domestic complexes characterizes the new regional arrangement, with intricate plans, including several annexes, units communicated by courtyards and ante-rooms as the plan exhibited in site 94/10 and at Nahal Zanoah, also in Ramat Bet Shemesh, Nahal Zanoah (A-6912/2013, A-7148/2015 Betzer and Shalem, personal communication). The walls were carved in the rock and on top of it built of fieldstones. The floors, in general, are packed earth or paved with small stones.

The character of the complex and the surrounding area is eminently rural. One hundred meters from the site, the remains of another living complex, oil presses, and terraces were found, supporting this assertion in Site 94/29 (Dagan 2010: 206, no. 251). The finds point out domestic use of the units: table serving, preparation, cooking pots, *tabuns*, storage vessels, and lamps, and one weight for weaving attest to the domestic character of the complex. Storage jars, cisterns, underground storage spaces, and wine presses are evidence for wine production at the site.

Noteworthy is the construction of Unit IV with a bathtub and the facilities associated with it and with water. It seems that the unit was meant for washing and maybe for ritual purification. Tubs are characteristic of dwelling houses of Palestine during the Hellenistic, and Early Roman periods in several areas of the country (cf., Reich 1990), still they are not exclusive to a specific type of population (Hirschfeld 1995: 66; Hirschfeld and Birger-Calderon 1991: 91).

Based on the finds and the architectural features, we suggest that the complex was used as a farm through the Hasmonean period and abandoned before the middle of the 1st century BC. Since the only features that seemed to continue to be in use were the underground spaces, it seems probable that the inhabitants moved to another complex in the vicinity and used the old building as a storage facility. The building's abandonment was apparently deliberate and planned, as evidenced by the few sherds found on the floors and no signs of violence were discerned.

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# The Lod Mosaic Revisited: New Discoveries in the Roman *Domus*

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*Since its accidental discovery in 1994, a series of archaeological excavations at the Lod mosaic site have revealed the excellently preserved remains of a lavish mansion, including a luxurious mosaic executed with a high degree of perfection and realism, dated to the end of the 3rd, or beginning of the 4th century AD. The excavations received unusual media and journalistic coverage from the very beginning.*

*Other mosaics were also revealed in a peristyle courtyard and other rooms. The site also includes several archaeological layers, from the Early Roman to the Ottoman period. The mosaic, which was dismantled to allow the construction of a museum to house it, has been exhibited in some of the world's most prestigious museums. The removal of the mosaic allowed us to examine the *modus operandi* of its builders, contributing to our knowledge of the subject. The 2018 new excavations allowed us to almost complete the reconstruction of the house. With the opening of the visitor center, the mosaic returned to its original location, for the benefit of the community.*

KEYWORDS: ROMAN MOSAICA; LOD; DOMUS; TRICLINIUM; MARINE SCENE; PERISTYLE; SINOPIA.

## Introduction

Lod (Hebrew: לוד; Arabic: *al-Ludd*, اللد; Latin: *Lidda*, Diospolis; Greek: Λύδδα; Διόσπολις), is located on the coastal plain, about 15km southeast of Tel Aviv. Like other cities in Israel, it is a historic city with a considerable archaeological heritage, from which were excavated remains dating from the Neolithic period and throughout various historical periods (for Lod and its history see Oppenheimer 1988; Schwartz 1991; 2015; for a summary of archaeological research at Lod see Gorzalczany 2019: 228, nos. 23, 24, 26). But it is also a living city, whose inhabitants have basic needs to cover. This situation produces conflicts created between the need to protect cultural heritage and yet allow for the construction and maintenance of infrastructure and housing. For that reason, construction work in heritage valuable areas is carried out under archaeological supervision by the Israel Antiquities Authority (henceforth IAA). These works often result in the discovery of important archaeological remains that necessitate excavations, as in the case at hand. Archeological investigations have been conducted in Lod in the Newe Yaraq neighborhood since an accidental discovery prompted the first salvage excavation directed by Miriam Avissar, which revealed a magnificent mansion with mosaic floors of unexpected quality (Avissar 1996; 1998; 1999, 2001; Bowersock *et al.* 2015; Gorzalczany 2019).<sup>1</sup>

A luxurious Roman house (Figures 1:1, 2:1) has since been unearthed (Stratum VI, dated to the 3rd–4th centuries AD), with splendid mosaics (Figures 3–4) that paved a large *triclinium* with artistic influences from North Africa (*Africa Proconsularis*). These represent realistic scenes from the animal kingdom as well as detailed nautical scenes that include fish, mythological creatures, and merchant vessels. The richness of the mosaics, the realism and perfection of the figures themselves, and their remarkable state of preservation, make the Lod Mosaic an outstanding example of the opulence and sophistication of the ancient city. Following its discovery, the floor was covered in order to protect it until a decision was made concerning the fate of the site. It has been published extensively (e.g., Talgam 2014; 2015b), and it is not in the scope of this paper to discuss it again. Successive seasons of excavations were conducted in 2009 (Figures 1:2; 2:2) and 2014 (Figures 1:3; 2:3) (Gorzalczany 2018; Gorzalczany *et al.* 2016), during which a peristyle courtyard was exposed south of the *triclinium*, paved with a luxurious mosaic floor. In 2018, nearly twenty years after the first season, a new mosaic was discovered.

In this article I will briefly recapitulate the results of the first two excavations in the domus, and then focus on a more detailed analysis of the third, recently exposed mosaic, in the context of the building that is gradually being revealed.

<sup>1</sup> The excavations were carried out under the auspices of the IAA and underwritten by the Lod Municipality, the Shelby White Foundation and L. Levy. In addition to the author and M. Avissar as directors, the following participated: U. 'Ad, H. Torgë, E. Jakoeel and Y. Elisha (area supervisors), A. Peretz and N. Davidov (photography), P. Gendelman (ceramics), D. Tzvi-Ariel (numismatics), E. Bachar and J. Amrani (administration), R. Liran, R. Mishayev (surveying), N. Zak (plans), A. Degot (GIS and maps). The conservation works were led by J. Neguer and G. Abu-Dihab. The mosaics were studied by R. Talgam (University of Jerusalem). The author deeply appreciates the cooperation of A. Azab, A. Shadman (IAA), E. Ayalon (Eretz-Israel Museum), as well

as archaeology students from Renmin University (Beijing-China), through the Confucius Institute in Tel Aviv. I also wish to express my gratitude to the Municipality of Lod, and to the residents of the Newe Yaraq neighborhood for their patience and understanding, as well as an anonymous reader who offered important observations. It goes without saying that any possible remaining errors are my sole responsibility. The graphic material is provided by courtesy of the IAA.

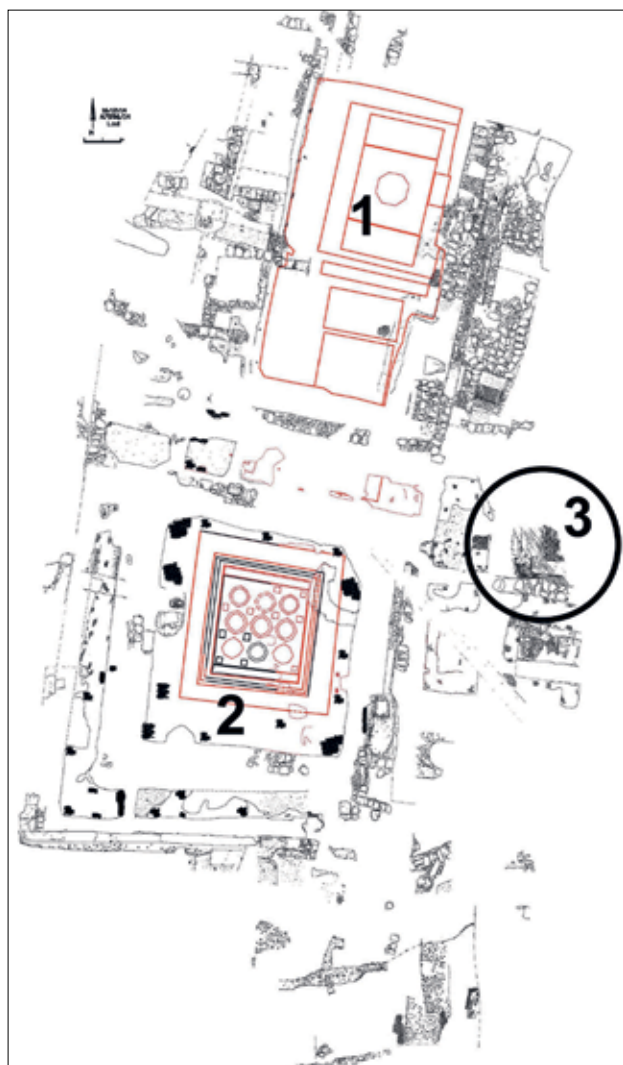


Figure 1. The excavations in the Roman mansion in Lod: 1. The main triclinium excavated in 1996, 2. The peristyle courtyard partially exposed in 2009 and fully excavated 2014 and 3. The eastern triclinium, glimpsed in 2014 and fully revealed in 2018 (plan: Natalia Zak, IAA).

### The 2009 Excavations

The objective of this season was to clean and prepare the main mosaic for removal. After being dismantled the mosaic floor (Figure 5) was restored and carefully prepared by IAA archaeologists and curators, in order to be displayed in some of the most prestigious museums in the world, including the Louvre, the British Museum, the Altes Museum and the Hermitage. During this time, a new visitors center was constructed in the empty lot.

The dismantling of the mosaic permitted us to study the construction technique used in its creation, whose *modus operandi* was reconstructed. Upon dismantling the floor and the stones beneath, the footprints of the craftsmen who built it, both barefoot and wearing shoes, were discovered imprinted on the *nucleus* (Figure 6). Strikingly small footprints were also observed, belonging possibly to a boy, perhaps a young apprentice (Talgam 2015b: 70, fig. 52).



Figure 2. Air view to the south-west of the site, after the 2014 excavations: 1. The main triclinium (1996), after the mosaic removal, 2. the peristyle courtyard (2009, 2014) and 3. The eastern triclinium (2014, 2018) (Photo: Sky View, IAA).



Figure 3. The main triclinium mosaic (Photo: Nikki Davidov, IAA).

Beneath the mosaic were the remains of the sinopia, the outline drawn to serve as a guide for the artist (*tesellarium*) who fixed the stones in place (Gallone 2009: 30, figs. 42.1a, 42.3; Robotti 1983; Woods-Mardsen 1985–86).





Figure 4. The marine scene on the southern carpet of the main triclinium (Photo: Nikki Davidov, IAA).



Figure 5. Preparations for the removal of the main mosaic by the IAA conservation department (Photo: Amir Gorzalczany, IAA).



Figure 6. One of the footprints imprinted on the nucleus, revealed after the mosaic was removed (Photo: Nikki Davidov, IAA).

The sinopia featured a variety of colors, up to five different shades, achieved with different pigments. Such an investment in the preparation of the sketch is highly unusual, since customarily these are monochromatic, (reddish or ochre hue). It is therefore conceivable that the effort invested in the sinopia was in direct proportion to the importance assigned the mosaic. This seems to confirm

our assumption about the value attributed to the pavement. The outline of the Lod mosaic (Figure 7) turned out to be unparalleled and it aroused a great deal of interest. As such, it has been studied in collaboration with the University of Padua, Italy, whose laboratories identified the mineral pigments that composed the colors: dark red ochre, yellow ochre, green earth, carbon black and cinnabar (Piovesani, Maritan and Neguer 2014; Piovesani *et al.* 2012).



Figure 7. The colorful sinopia revealed under the mosaic. The small squares are not tesserae but their imprinting (Photo: Nikki Davidov, IAA).

### The Findings of the 2014 Excavation

For years, funding problems, logistical difficulties and a lack of consensus between the authorities and the residents regarding the fate of the mosaic and the museum, prevented the continuation of the project, and it was only during the excavations in 2014 that new parts of the building were exposed. The preparations for the excavation included the





Figure 8. The mosaic that paved the peristyle courtyard, glimpsed in 2009 and fully excavated in 2014. Looking north (Photo: Assaf Peretz, IAA).



Figure 9. Archaeology students from Renmin University (Beijing-China) cleaning the mosaic during the 2014 excavations. In the medallion, a harnessed cheetah hunting is featured. Looking south (Photo: Amir Gorzalczy, IAA).

closure and diversion of streets near the site in order to expand the area under investigation.

The discoveries included a peristyle courtyard to the south, a small portion of which had been exposed in its southwest corner during limited soundings conducted in 2009 (Figures 8–9). Its measurements were 11 × 13m, which adds to the total length of the mansion on the north-south axis up to approximately 42m. Its floor was also covered by a colorful mosaic of high quality, decorated with rows of octagonal medallions, nine in total, and mostly decorated with scenes of animals in the chase and killing (Gorzalczy 2015; 2016; Gorzalczy *et al.* 2016: figs. 4–7).



Figure 10. An earlier, non-figurative-mosaic (Stratum VIII; dated as to the 1st century or early 2nd century AD) partially exposed during 2014. Looking north-east (Photo: Amir Gorzalczy, IAA).

During 2014 other important discoveries were made. For example, a non-figurative mosaic from Stratum VIII, dating to the 1st or early 2nd century AD, was partially exposed (Gorzalczy 2015: 38, 41, fig. 17; Talgam 2015a). This purely geometric mosaic (Figure 10), in red, black and white, is clearly different from the mosaics discussed above, yet like one exposed in the immediate vicinity (Yannai and Erlich 2015: 217–218). Also, a mosaic of which only a small part was preserved was unearthed. This mosaic (Figure 11), located at a stratigraphically higher level and manufactured in a quality inferior to the mosaics of the Roman period described above, was dated to the end





Figure 11. A later mosaic, manufactured in a quality inferior to the mosaics of the Roman period described above, was dated as to the end of the Byzantine or the Umayyad period (Strata IV-III). Looking north (Photo: Amir Gorzalczany, IAA).

of the Byzantine or early Umayyad period (Strata IV-III) (Gorzalczany *et al.* 2016: Figure 11).

Other discoveries in 2014 included the remains of an *opus signinum* floor (a floor with tiles spilt into small pieces, mixed with cement). And some important epigraphic discoveries were made, including an amphora sherd with a commercial inscription indicating its contents (*titulus pictus*). Additionally, fragments of colorful stucco that decorated the walls of the building were recovered.

At the same time, in the east area of the site, several rooms were excavated, including the southwestern corner of another colorful mosaic of excellent quality, the third one related to this architectural phase (Stratum VI) revealed on the site (Figure 12). Since this new discovery extended underneath a parking lot, it was impossible to complete its excavation at that time. It was covered again in order to preserve it. Only during 2018, when the museum construction commenced, it became necessary to complete the disclosure.

### The New 2018 Excavations

After the cleaning of the site, the corner of the mosaic discovered in 2014 was exposed together with the



Figure 12. The southwestern corner of the emblem in the eastern triclinium, as glimpsed in 2009. Looking east (photo: Amir Gorzalczany, IAA).

surrounding walls (Gorzalczany 2018), in a total area of 50m<sup>2</sup>. These walls were built with one or two rows of stones of different sizes, of which only lowest row was preserved.

A modern sewer pipe cutting across the excavation was installed in unknown circumstances, a few inches above the level of the mosaic, but without damaging it. However, it seems that it did damage an additional later mosaic, located at a higher elevation, *tesserae* of which were found scattered in the fill of the trench. The layer in which they originated was not pinpointed in the excavation, but it stands to reason that it should be identified as Byzantine or early Islamic, periods during which the site was still inhabited and widely represented in other, better-preserved areas.



Figure 13. The emblem fully excavated in 2018, looking north (photo: Nikki Davidov, IAA).

The exposed room, the size of which could not be established, is part of the east wing of the magnificent house unearthed in the past. The room had a good quality white mosaic floor displaying a colorful quadrangular panel in its center, a central carpet depicting figures from the animal and vegetal kingdoms (Figures 13–14). The length of the panel on the axis from east to west could



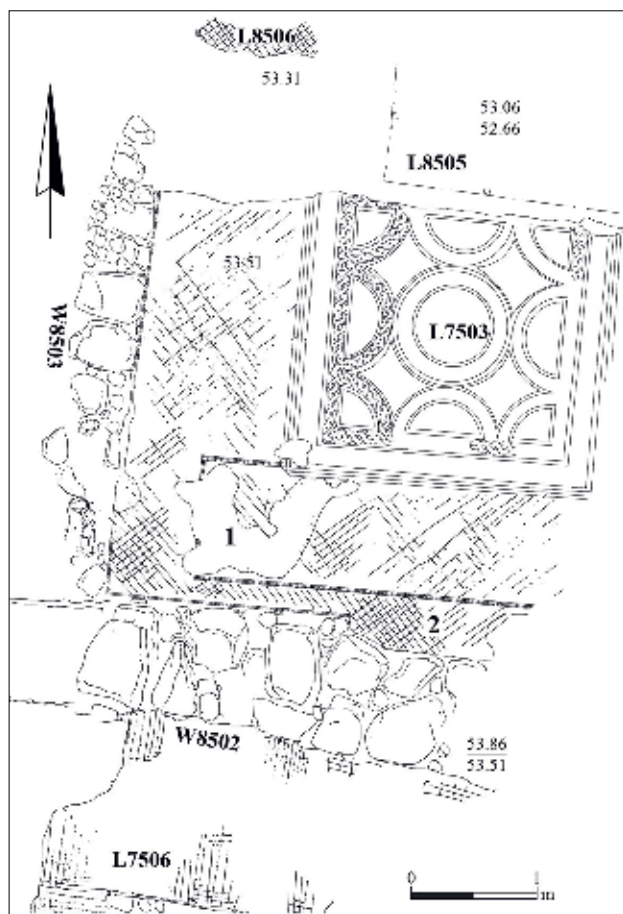


Figure 14. Eastern triclinium, plan; 1. The emblem and the rectangle demarcating the place for the klinē; 2. Partially damaged (plan: Natalia Zak, IAA).

not be established because the mosaic extended beyond the excavated area. However, both its style and symmetry allow us to assume that it was square, a fact that can only be corroborated by future excavations.

The central panel, composed of small *tesserae* of excellent quality, is framed by several rows of black and white stones and braided rope motifs and loops in various shades: red, yellow, black and white. It contains a round, central medallion surrounded by several concentric red, black, and white circles in increasing diameters, up to 1m on the outer circumference. Four semi-circular halfmedallions, with straight sides (diameters) oriented towards the cardinal points, surround the central medallion, in contact with it by their perimeters. All are iconographically decorated.

Like the central medallion, the semicircles are delimited by several concentric frames. The straight diameter lines of the semicircles are arranged along the outer perimeter of the central panel. In the corners of the panel are four quarter medallions (quadrants), with straight sides (radii) arranged at the length of the corners, on both sides of the right angles and joining at the vertices. As a result, four rhomboidal spaces with concave sides are formed in the gaps between the central medallion, the semicircles, and the quarter medallions, spaces which provide further opportunities for artistic expression.

The iconography of the panel is composed entirely of faunistic motifs, although representing only fish and birds. The medallion in the central part of the mosaic is the area characterized by the highest quality of execution and contains representations of three different species of fish swimming in opposite directions: two to the west and one to the east. They are rendered in a gradual *chiaroscuro*, making use of light and shadow in gradating shades to skillfully provide a three-dimensional sense of volume.

The semicircles also exhibit marine fauna: fish and probably dolphins. The quarter medallions in the corners of the panel are decorated with birds. No branches or similar objects are observed in the background, so the impression is that the birds are perched on the ground, which is not seen. Oppositely, in the concave rhomboids created between the medallion and the semicircles one can see birds perched on the branches of a pomegranate and ivy. These are usual, common motifs in other mosaics unearthed at the site, e.g., trios of fish appear in the mosaic in the peristyle courtyard (Gorzalczany et al. 2016: Fig. 7), while birds are found both in it and in the mosaics in the *triclinium* excavated in 1996 (Avissar 1998; 1999).

This new mosaic cannot be analyzed independently. It should be placed in context with the other mosaics formerly excavated in the same mansion. It is likely that whoever commissioned the works and chose the themes displayed, was genuinely interested in marine and nautical motifs, including detailed and accurate representations of fish and ships (Avissar 2001; Haddad 2009; Haddad and Avissar 2003; Friedman 2004; Gorzalczany and Rosen 2019; Gorzalczany, Rosen and Sukenik 2020; Rosen 2004). It should not surprise us that fish were also the chosen subject for the central motif of this floor's decoration.

The mosaic floor is made of *tesserae* of various sizes. The average size of the *tesserae* of the central medallion ( $0.8 \times 0.8$ cm) allows a detailed, high-resolution design. The stones in the semicircles are slightly larger ( $1 \times 1$ cm), while the frame and corners featured even larger *tesserae* ( $1.2 \times 1.2$ cm). The central panel is surrounded by white mosaic stripes partially preserved, approximately 1m wide, but damaged in some places. Gaps were observed on the southern strip, and the northern one was also damaged, when a large trench was excavated perhaps for the theft of antiquities, *spolia* or for modern infrastructure, which is plentiful on the site. However, a fragment of white mosaic floor discovered in the northern part of the area presents stylistic similarities with the rest, thus it was identified tentatively as the probable continuation of the carpet that bordered the panel the area east of the central panel could only be partially excavated, but it can be assumed that also was paved with a white mosaic.

The mosaic strip south of the panel features a rectangular area (at least  $1 \times 2.6$ m), delineated by a three-row *tesserae* band aligned in a different orientation from those around them (Figure 15). The rectangle could indicate the location for a *klinē* (Greek: κλίνη), a sofa or armchair for the guests of a reception or a banquet (Greek: *symposium*; συμπόσιον; Latin: *convivium*), according to the custom



Figure 15. The eastern triclinium, looking west (photo: Nikki Davidov, IAA).

of the time (Dunbabin 1993; 1995; 2003; Hudson 2010). In such events they put couches with cushions on three sides of the room, allowing guests to recline on each couch while ate (hence the name of the room, *triclinium*, from the Greek word *τρικλίνιον*, i.e., ‘three klinē’). The fourth side of the room usually was left free so that the servants could circulate and serve food and drink. This description seems to fit the evidence revealed at the excavation. In our case, the entrance to the room was probably located along the western wall, as there is no place for a klinē on the mosaic strip on this side. The east side of the room has not yet been exposed and should a similar mark be found on it in future excavations, this would confirm our hypothesis.

If the proposed scenario is correct, the room would represent an additional *triclinium*, that would complement the luxurious one exposed in 1996, albeit much smaller. Such a discovery has an intrinsic value that modifies our perception of the layout of the mansion. In face of the evidence, it is reasonable to assume that the residential rooms of the house extended further east or occupied an area that is no longer extant, and either case the size of this wealthy mansion was larger than previously thought. It could have included several *triclinia*, for different occasions, as in similar buildings throughout the Roman world.

Several dark spots found on the floor of the mosaic are probably soot or burn marks. It is possible then that the building was destroyed or damaged by an earthquake or some other violent incident in which hanging lamps fell, causing a fire.

As for the design of the floor and the iconography represented in the mosaic, these are not unusual in the region. An almost identical stylistically and thematically

parallel was discovered in the southwest slope of Mount Zion in Jerusalem, approximately 120m south of the Church of St Peter in Gallicantu (Avner 1994: 21\*). Both mosaics are surprisingly similar in size, composition, and iconography. The main and almost only difference is that instead of the trio of fish in the central medallion in Lod, the Jerusalem example depicts the partially damaged bust of a female figure. It is still identifiable by the Greek letters ΓΗ (Ge) as Gaia or Gaea (Γαῖα), the primordial Greek goddess of the earth (Terra of the Romans) and the ancestral mother of all life, dressed in a red robe and wearing a crown of walls as an attribute. Apart from this difference, the choice of motifs is almost identical, only with more birds instead of fish. This choice, with its similarities and differences, does not seem to be random, as the absence of human figures is observed in all the mosaics recovered to date at the domus in Lod, and this did not go unnoticed by researchers. This reluctance to represent human figures may have had an ethnic, cultural, or religious-ideological motivation.

In terms of composition, parallels dating from the 2nd to the 4th century AD are abundant, and similar mosaics are known in the western Empire, including Britain (Morgan 1886: 139; Neal 1981: 87, fig. 66; Smith 1975: 279–280; pls. 120–121), Germany (Hellenkemper-Salies 1983: 339, figs. 3–4.), the Balkan area (Mano-Zissi 1965: 289, fig. 4), Italy (Maioli 1983: 465, 470–471), France (Lancha 1983: 383, fig. 2.) and Spain (Blázquez-Martínez 1978: 32, no. 9, fig. 12; 1981: 46, no. 23, fig. 89).

These artistic choices hint that the mansion dwellers had polished and refined cosmopolitan tastes. Their preferences for artistic decorations syncretize aesthetic influences from the north of Africa (Parrish 1984: 144–146, pl. 33), as already pointed out by researchers (Gorzalczany *et al.* 2016: figs. 4–7; Gorzalczany and Rosen 2018; Talgam 2014: 69–70), incorporating Western influences (Avner 1994: 21), as in the case of the mosaic discussed here.

Despite its limited scope, the 2018 excavation is a significant contribution to the understanding of the mansion in Lod. In addition, it clarifies the plan of the building, whose form and function were not sufficiently evident before the excavation. Now, for the first time, we can examine parts of the house besides the *triclinium* (the 1996 excavation) and the peristyle courtyard (the 2009 and 2014 excavations). It seems then that a room was discovered which can be identified quite accurately as a *triclinium* (albeit smaller than the one previously known) instead of a private room or perhaps a workroom (*tablinum*), as was formerly thought. This conclusion raises new questions, such as the location of the residential areas, that remain unanswered: were these in the east wing, in an area not yet excavated or on a second floor? Similarly, questions arise concerning the location of the service wing, the storage rooms, and the kitchen (*culina*) as well as the general extension of the building.

Based on the quality of the mosaics and the colorful stucco remains and fragments recovered in previous excavations,

one can affirm that this part of the building was also luxurious and reflected the refined standard of living and opulence enjoyed by its wealthy owners.

The final size of the building has not yet been established, but it is clearly an architectural complex belonging to residents with a high socioeconomic status, and it was renovated and expanded over several generations. That fact, in addition to the various mosaics discovered nearby in the past, are clear evidence that the area was a prosperous neighborhood, and it points to the possibility that the wealthy cultural and social elite lived here and enjoyed the robust economic development of Lod during its days of greatness.

This period of glory would come to an end with the Muslim conquest, the transformation of the *Palaestina Prima* province into the district *Jund Filastin*, and the construction of the new capital, Ramla, which was built during the Umayyad Caliphate with the goal of to replace Lod as a center of commerce and government. The transfer and relocation, whether voluntary or enforced, of goldsmiths, craftsmen, and traders from Lod to Ramla as well as its productive capacities, certainly weakened Lod, and contributed to its decline.

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# The Late Antique Mansion Occupying Insula W2S4

## Caesarea Maritima

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*The Late Antique mansion (late 4th/early 5th – first half of the 7th century AD) exposed by the IAA team during the 1990s within Insula W2S4, is the so far most extensively excavated elite dwelling of Late Antique Caesarea. The mansion includes a lavishly decorated living and hosting unit on its south, and a vast horreum - warehouse on its north. The living part consists of a peristyle court with a fountain, an additional court surrounded with living rooms, two triclinia of which one is a triconch flanked by rooms; all paved with multicolor tessellated and opus sectile mosaics, lined with marble and glass mosaics. All parts of the complex were connected by the east-west corridor, which also enabled access to the Low Garden facing the sea. The garden was adorned with a fountain and a pergola. The private bath of the owners and a piscina – fishpond, were partially exposed on the southernmost part of the mansion .*

*Being the only extensively exposed upper-class residential complex, the Insula W2S4 mansion provides most valuable information about Caesarea elite dwellings. The size of the complex, the division into two units and the luxurious decoration indicate that the owners of the mansion were among the wealthiest and most influential Caesarea inhabitants, which likely held an office in the city council and/or in the provincial administration.*

**KEYWORDS:** CAESAREA MARITIMA; LATE ANTIQUITY; LATE ANTIQUE MANSION; ANSIENT GARDENS; HORREUM; PISCINA; PIVATE BATH; OPUS SECTILE MOSAIC; TESSELATED MOSAIC; OPUS SECTILE WORKSHOP; TRICHONCH TRICLINIUM.

### Introduction

During the 1992–1998 excavations at Caesarea Maritima, the IAA mission uncovered several *insulae* along the South-West Zone (SWZ) of the ancient city (Figure 1). One of them was Insula W2S4, located along the seashore and bordered by *Decumani* S3 and S4 on the north and south respectively, and by *Cardo* W1 on the east and probably W2 on the west.<sup>1</sup> Insula W2S4, like all other Late Antique *insulae* along the city's SWZ, was reshaped when by the end of the fourth – beginning of the fifth century AD. Herod's Circus was filled with enormous amount of earth mixed with city wasters.<sup>2</sup> Insula W2S4 then extended westward over the former entertainment facility (Porath 2013: 173) and till AD 614 or 640/641 was occupied by an elegant mansion.

Although the complex is the most extensively excavated dwelling of Late Antique Caesarea it was only briefly reported (Porath 1998: 41; Porath 2000: 38\*, fig. 56; Porath 2008: 1660–1661). In this paper an effort is made to present a more detailed description of the mansion and put forward an interpretation concerning the function of its compartments.



Figure 1. Map of Late Antique Caesarea Maritima (A. Iamim and P. Gendelman).

<sup>1</sup> The excavations on behalf of IAA were directed by Y. Porath. Insula W2S4 was excavated as part of several excavation areas: Area I+ (supervised by A. Gorzalczyk 1992-1993), Area I+N (supervised by Y. Lotan 1993-1996), Area I+G (supervised by K. Gur 1993-1994), Area I+A (supervised by A. Yasur and P. Gendelman 1994-1996), and Area I (supervised by D. Lipkowsky, P. Gendelman and O. Peri 1992-1998).

<sup>2</sup> The chronology of the SWZ *insulae*, situated east of the eastern cavea of Herod's Circus, started c. AD 10 (Porath 1996: 110–112; Porath

2013: 75). Between the 1st and 4th centuries AD, their western part faced the circus' 'Pillared Gallery C3800' (Porath 2013: 110-116). The remains of this period are poorly preserved; they include rooms paved with plaster and mosaics—some decorated with multicolored *emblemata*—plastered walls, cooking devices (*tabuns*) etc. The poor state of preservation and limited exposure of these remains do not allow precise identifications, though they may be interpreted as dwelling remains like those in the neighboring Domus of the Dioscuri (Gendelman and Gersht 2018).



During the nearly two hundred fifty years of existence, the complex has undergone several alternations. The remains point to two main phases: the first, which was only partially exposed, dates to the late 4th or early 5th century AD; the 2nd dates to the 6th century AD. During the early 7th century AD, preparations were made for renovating the mansion once more. It seems that the mansion, though only partially excavated, occupied a major part of the insula (c.  $90 \times 80 \text{ m} / 7200 \text{ m}^2$ ) and consisted of several components in three topographical levels. At least two entrances served this complex – one in the north via street Decumanus S3; the other, not yet found, was likely in the east via Cardo W1 street.

### The Northern Unit

The northern unit on its several wings is arranged around central court in the median level (Figures 2, 3).

### The Northern Entrance (Figure 2: E1-3)

The northern entrance to the complex—the only one exposed—was through a wide gateway flanked by pilasters bearing Corinthian capitals of which only one, decorated with a cross within a wreath, preserved (Figure 4). The entrance corridor E1 ( $6.3 \times 3 \text{ m}$ ) and the following antechamber E2 ( $8.5 \times 6.5 \text{ m}$ ) were paved with stone slabs and were probably left unroofed. To the west of the corridor was a sizable room (E3;  $6.4 \times 4 \text{ m}$ ) paved with marble slabs, which probably served as a waiting room. The antechamber is connected to a rectangular court A which enabled the entrance to several of the units' wings.

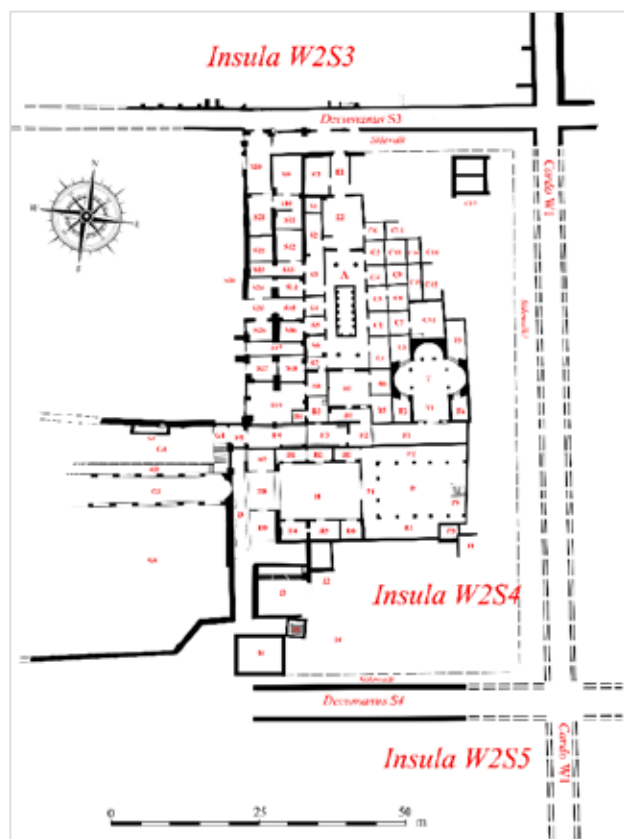


Figure 2. Schematic Plan of the Insula W2S4 mansion (R. Mishaev and P. Gendelman).



Figure 3. Northern Unit, aerial view (Sky View Photography Ltd.).

### The Porticoed Court and the Rooms to its South (Figure 2: A, B1-6)

The court A ( $19.3 \times 6.6 \text{ m}$ ) includes a couple of distyle porticoes ( $6.6 \times 2.8 \text{ m}$  each) on its northern and southern edges (Figures 5, 6). The porticoes' ceiling, as evinced by the better-preserved southern portico, was supported by local sandstone (*kurkar*) columns consisted of drums and crowned by Doric capitals, all taken from the dismantled 'Pillared Gallery C3800'. The original court pavement was entirely dismantled during the second phase. The rectangular decorative pool (c.  $8 \times 3 \text{ m}$ ) is placed in the center of the court. The remains of the pool indicate that the outer sides were faced with marble, the inner sides—including the long ones consisted of alternating semicircular and rectangular projections—were plastered with waterproof mortar, and the bottom

was paved with marble slabs. A large underground cistern was found beneath the pool (Figure 7). When in the second phase the pool and the northern portico dismantled, a simple plaster floor with patches of stone slabs were laid over the entire area.

The wide opening at the southern portico, led to a large room B1 ( $7 \times 5.5 \text{ m}$ ) paved with multicolored tessellated mosaic composed of octagons and squares (Figure 8). This room had five additional openings. The two in its eastern wall led to a couple of rooms paved with tessellated mosaics. The southern room B5 ( $4 \times 3.4 \text{ m}$ ) is decorated





*Figure 4. Northern entrance, view to the south and Corinthian pilaster capital (P. Gendelman).*



*Figure 5. Porticoed Court A during excavation, view to the south (A. Peri; courtesy of IAA).*



*Figure 6. Porticoed Court A with remains of decorative pool, view to the south (P. Gendelman).*





Figure 7. Underground cistern beneath Porticoed Court A (A. Peri; courtesy of IAA).



Figure 8. Room B1, view to the west (P. Gendelman).

with colored *emblema* within a simple frame, the northern room B6 (4×3m) with a white carpet bordered by black tesserae (Figure 9). The two openings in the southern wall of room B1 led to an intermediate small compartment B2 (7×2m), paved with plaster, which made possible the access to the southern parts of the complex. The fifth opening at the western wall was blocked in a certain point,

perhaps when room B3 (4×3.1m) was modified to be used as an *opus sectile* workshop storeroom during the early 7th century AD preparations for the renovation of the mansion. The southern opening of this room provided additional access to the southern part of the complex.





Figure 9. Rooms B5-6 view to the north (P. Gendelman).

### The Western Wing

The area to the west of the entrance was occupied by sets of interconnected spaces (see Figures 2: S1-S28; 3), which replaced the ‘Pillared Gallery C3800’, and functioned as *horreum*. For constructing these spaces, local sandstone ashlar partitions were added between the pillars and openings were set to connect one space with another. The access to this wing was made possible via antechamber E2 and the porticoed court. The size of the spaces varied from 6.5×5 to 1.9×1.9m; the large ones were paved with stone slabs, the small ones mainly with plaster (Figure 10). It is possible, given the thickness of the walls, that some of these spaces functioned as small inner courts.

The western part of the wing, which suffered erosion and extensive stone robbery, did not survive, yet the western openings of the westernmost spaces, and the south-north run drainage suggest, that a long corridor or alley S28 existed perpendicularly to *Decumanus* S3. Only one space—S12—preserved the remains of a geometric mosaic floor. A similar room of another Caesarea *horrea* was interpreted as a *horreum* manager office (Patrich 1999: 77). The wing seems to be in use during both phases and most probably was under the authority of the mansion’s owners.



Figure 10. Rooms S17-19, 27, view to the south-east (P. Gendelman).





Figure 11. Medallion on Room C13 (T. Sagiv; courtesy of IAA).



Figure 12. Underground granaries C17, view to the west (T. Sagiv; courtesy of IAA).

### The Eastern Wing

This partially excavated, and badly damaged area had at least three rows of interconnected rooms (see Figure 2: C1-17). All preserved rooms of the western row were paved in plaster or stone slabs. The rooms of the second and third rows were mostly paved with tessellated mosaics mainly of multicolored geometric patterns. Two of them also included medallions of which one—in C15—is badly damaged; the other—in C13—preserved a seven rows Greek inscription (Figure 11):

Ἰωάννης, | υἱὸς Προκοπίου | τοῦ τῆς [καλῆ]ς μηνῆ|μης,  
ἐψ[ή]φισεν ἐν] μηνί) Μαρτίου ζ', [ινδ. ...εὐ]τυχ(ῶς) |  
Ἰωάννου σὺν τέκνοις·| ἀμήν

*Ioannes, son of the well-remembered Procopius, made this mosaic in the month of March, on the 7th (day), in the ... indiction. Well-being to Ioannes with (his) children. Amen.* (CIIP II: 336–337).<sup>3</sup>

Additional rooms to the north of C13 were paved with tessellated mosaics; some with multicolored patterns. During the first phase the functioning of the eastern wing

<sup>3</sup> The authors of the Corpus quoted Porath's mistaken location—Insula W2S5 instead of Insula W2S4—of the room with inscription given in the preliminary report (see Porath 2000: 39\*).

was clearly domestic; the average measures of the rooms (3-4×2-4m) accord with living rooms standard. In the second phase the area changed function – all mosaic floors were repaved with stone slabs, and a couple of joint underground granaries C17 was constructed at the northeast part of the excavated area (Figure 12). This kind of granaries is familiar from another Caesarea Late Antique *horrea* (Patrich 1996: 164–167). All the above indicate that during the second phase this area was modified to be used, like the Western wing, as *horreum*.



Figure 13. Compartment F2, view to the south-west (P. Gendelman).

### The Southern Unit

The excavated parts of the southern half of the mansion spread over three levels oriented east west. A private bath occupied the southern upper level; a triconch triclinium, a couple of courts and adjoining rooms occupied the median level, and a garden the lower level.

### The East-West Corridor

The five interconnected parts of this long corridor connected most of the compartments of the unit (see Figure 2: F1-5). Most of the doorways between the parts preserved their marble thresholds, of which some bear evidence for a double door. The largest among the corridor's compartments F1 (14.7×3.5m) had *opus sectile* floor, whose negatives point to several carpets of poised square design. From this part, one could enter the triconch *triclinium* T, as well as the peristyle court P and adjoining 'marble court' H. The small central part F2 (3.8×3.8m) had two doorways, one led to the Northern Unit, the other to the western parts of the corridor. Its *opus sectile* floor is composed of alternating white (marble) and dark gray (schist) square slabs (Figure 13). To the west of F2 are three compartments with tessellated mosaic floors. The eastern F3 (6.8×3.8m), which led to the western wing of the Northern Unit (see above), also preserved the tessellated mosaic of the early phase, which was only partially excavated. During the second phase, F3 got a new colored tessellated mosaic decorated with scale pattern inscribed with stylized rose buds, and a black double band border; in addition, plastered ashlar benches were installed along its northern and southern walls (Figure 14). The F4 compartment of the corridor (9.8×3.8m) is paved with multicolored tessellated mosaic of poised squares and bordered by a stylized ivy band. In the first phase its walls



Figure 14: a. Compartment F3, view to the west; b. Compartment F4, view to the east.

were faced with marble slabs. During the second phase, plaster replaced the marble slabs, and like in F3, plastered ashlar benches were installed along its northern and southern walls. The western compartment of the corridor F5 (3.5×2.8m) preserved only patches of its multi colored tessellated floor of poised squares framed by guilloche (Figure 15); it provided the access to the upper landing of the stairway G1 leading to the Low Garden (see below).



Figure 15. Compartment F5, view to the west (P. Gendelman).

### The Peristyle Court (Figure 2: P, P1-5)

The easternmost excavated part of the unit was occupied by a large rectangular court P with three porticoes (14.5×8.5m). The court was paved with marble of which only few patches of whitish marble slabs over grayish bedding, preserved; likewise, the stylobates were lined with marble slabs. The columns (average 3.65m high) stood on the stylobates at an intercolumniation of 2.9m; four on the long southern and northern stylobates and two on the short western one (Figure 16). Ashlar pillars in the shape of Γ stood at the corners. The columns, made of proconnesian and cipollino marbles, were mounted upon Attic bases—two bases were found in situ on the southern stylobate—and crowned with Corinthian capitals, of which only two, almost intact, were found in the inner space of the court. From the east it was bordered by a high solid wall whose western face was covered with marble slabs. Remains of a fountain with rectangular basin P4 were found at the center of the eastern wall of the court (Figure 17). The basin (2×1.3m) had five steps on its



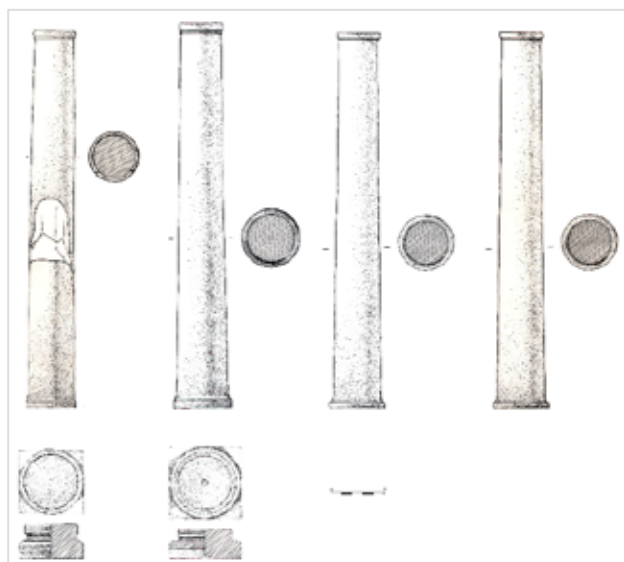


Figure 16. Architectural members from peristyle court P (drawing by B. Chaimov).



Figure 17. Fountain P4, view to the east (T. Sagiv; courtesy of IAA).

western side and was entirely veneered with marble slabs. Water supply reached the basin through a lead pipe, which was likely feed from the municipal water supply system installed beneath the pavement of *Cardo* W1 at the east.

The western portico P1 (15×2.5m) has an *opus sectile* floor composed of five rectangular carpets, each with alternating

slabs of white and gray marble, red sandstone, pink limestone and dark gray schist (Figure 18). A wide doorway in its back wall provided access to the 'Marble Court'. The northern portico P2 (15.5×3m) was also paved with *opus sectile* mosaic—partially preserved—of white marble and pink limestone slabs (Figure 19). From its back wall, only robbery trench remains, but some patches of white marble slabs on its inner facet indicate that it was, if not fully at least partially, veneered with marble. The southern portico P3 is a little bit wider than the others (15.5×3.2m). It is paved with plain tessellated mosaic, interrupted at the east-south corner by the remains of an



Figure 18. Peristyle court, western and northern porticoes, view to the east (A. Peri; courtesy of IAA).

ashlar-built structure P5 (3×2.5m), which likely served as foundation for a step-way (dismantled in the Early Islamic Period) whose purpose was to connect the peristyle court with the south-eastern part of the higher level of the complex.

### The 'Marble Court' and Adjoining Rooms

The large court H (13.6×9m) is situated south of corridor F and west of peristyle court P and is accompanied by three wings of three rooms each (see Figure 2: H, H1-9). During its first phase the court was paved with marble slabs, of which only imprints in the bedding preserved, and the walls were faced with marble. During the second phase the floor was repaved with large grayish white marble slabs (up to 67 × 40cm), and the walls were stripped out of their marble, and plastered (Figure 20). As no evidence for columns nor for arches was found we assume that the court was lacked of porticoes.

The rooms of the northern and southern wings are of moderate size apt for bedrooms. The spaces of the western wing seem to be more apt for dining and hosting. The access from the 'Marble Court' to the northern rooms H1-H3 and the southern rooms H4-H6 was via doorways with thresholds. The access to the side rooms of the western wing H7 and H9 was through a large exedra H8 (6.2×4.5m), which almost certainly served as triclinium open to the court. The stylobate of the exedra, as the remains evince, was covered with marble, and likely supported a pair of columns.



Figure 19. a: Peristyle court, northern portico, view to the south (A. Peri); b: The headless statue of an official found in the P3.



Figure 20. 'Marble Court' pavements from both phases, view to the east (A. Peri; courtesy of IAA).

Room H3 (4.3×2m) had two doorways: one facing the 'Marble Court', the other facing portico P2 of the peristyle court. Likewise, room H7—perhaps also room H9—had two doorways, one facing the exedra, the other facing portico D. Rooms H1 and H2 shared an inner doorway in addition to their doorway facing the court. The same arrangement repeats between room H4 and H5. All of the rooms were paved with either tessellated (rooms H1, H3, H5, H6) or *opus sectile* (rooms H2, H4, H7, H8) mosaics



Figure 21. *Opus sectile* mosaic pavement on H7, view to the west (P. Gendelman).



Figure 22. Tessellated mosaic pavement on H1, view to the north (P. Gendelman).

(Figure 21); most of them were multicolored and had rather intricate geometric patterns. The floor of room H9 did not survive; in rooms H1 and H3 a small geometric *emblema* at the threshold signified the entrance (Figure 22). Similar *emblemata* probably decorated the threshold of other rooms. The original multicolored tessellated mosaics of rooms H5 and H6 were replaced in the second





Figure 23. Architectural members thrown from the Western Portico D, view to the east (P. Gendelman).



Figure 24. a: Triconch Triclinium, view to the west (A. Peri; courtesy of IAA); b. Stone with cross-shaped bronze clamp from the collapsed semi-dome (P. Gendelman).

phase by white mosaics composed of larger tesserae. The design dominant was a grid of poised squares inscribed with simple and/or intricate motifs.

### The Western Portico

The western portico D (c. 20×2.5-3m) is located at the back of exedra H8 and rooms H7 and H9 (see Figure 2: D). A series of ashlar built square bases, incorporated into the western wall of the southern unit, separated the portico from the Low Garden, wherein a large number of complete and fragmentary architectural members was uncovered; all came from the median level. They include four complete columns of proconnesian and cipollino marbles (each 4.8m high, lower diameter of 60-63cm and upper 53-56cm; some bearing remains of ancient repair) along with comparable number of marble Attic bases, and three Corinthian capitals matching to the columns in diameter. Each of the Attic bases has vertical channels at its sides, cut to hold balustrade plaques (Figure 23). These architectural members enabled the reconstruction of this compartment as a four-column portico with stone or wood balustrade facing west toward the Low Garden, which was 4.5m lower than the floor of the portico, and toward seaside.

### The Triconch Triclinium (Figure 2: T, T1-5)

This luxurious compartment T is located north of the eastern part of the east-west corridor F1, and is flanked by four rectangular side-rooms—T2, 3 and T4, 5—which were accessible via four doorways—probably arched—with marble thresholds: two doorways in the western apse and two in the eastern. The main entrance to the Triconch Triclinium was through a rectangular antechamber T1 (6×5.5m), whose floor was robbed.

The inner space of the triclinium was paved with multicolored *opus sectile* mosaics, of which only the ones within the eastern and western apses are partially preserved. Their pattern consists of rhombuses inscribed

with crosses in white and grayish marbles, red sandstone, and dark gray schist (Figure 24a); of the northern apse only, the imprints preserved. The walls of the Triconch Triclinium preserved part of their marble revetment. That the semi-domes of the triconch were ornamented with glass-mosaic is learned from the pieces of multicolored glass tesserae and the shield and cross-shaped bronze clamps found within a pile of the collapsed semi-dome at the western apse (see Figure 24b).

The robbery trench of the southern wall of the triclinium yielded part of a marble column, whose lower diameter is 40cm. Three additional fragments of marble columns and two fragmentary Attic bases were found in front of the antechamber, and two complete ones were found reused in the peristyle court. All of these belonged to the series of the columns, each 2.95m high with upper diameter of 31-33cm, which could have supported the Triconch Triclinium roofing; a pair at the entrance to the antechamber and a pair at the front of each apse (Figure 25).

Of the four rectangular rooms, the north-western and north-eastern ones are paved with beautiful multicolored tessellated mosaics. *Emblema* of a windswept shield/medallion within a square decorates the entrance to



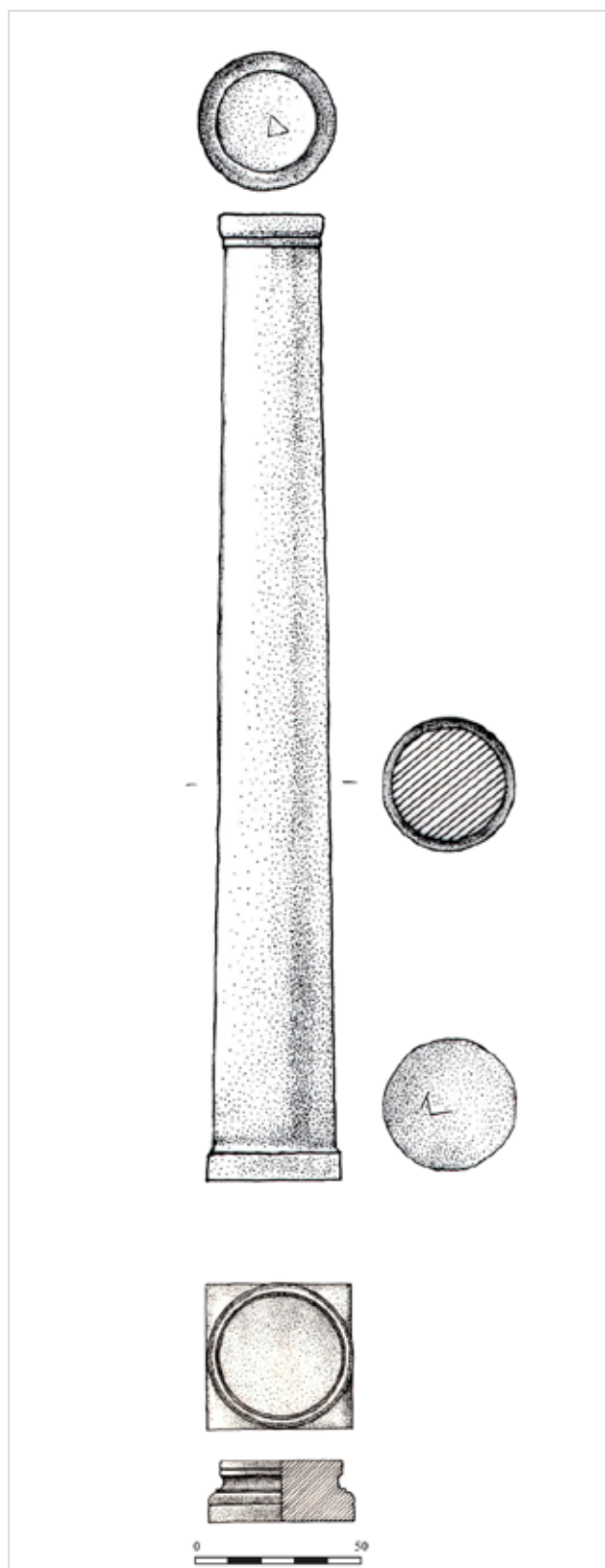


Figure 25. Architectural members from peristyle court P (drawing by B. Chaimov).

the northern-western room T3 (4-4.2×3.2m); a water bird inhabits the center of the medallion, and four beribboned parrots occupy the spandrels of the *emblemata* (Figure 26a).<sup>4</sup> The main carpet of this room consists of intersecting octagons inhabited with twenty-four squares, inscribed with a variety of intricate motifs, and with fifty-eight small rhombuses/diamonds; all bordered by a guilloche.

From the mosaic of the north-eastern room T5 (6-6.4×3.2m) only a small portion preserved. The carpet consisted of a triple band frame—guilloche flanked by wave bands—and two or four gadrooned amphorae with trumpet foot—only the one at the south-western corner preserved—from which issue vine scrolls inhabited with birds (Figure 26b). Only a single bustard and a single partridge preserved.

The south-western room T2 (4-4.2×3.2m) was paved with a much simpler mosaic, a grid of squares inscribed with serrated poised squares. The pavement of the south-eastern room T4 (c. 4-4.2×3.2m) was destroyed during the late activity on site.

### The Low Garden

The extensive garden (40×more than 34.5m) occupied the south-western quarter of the insula, in about 4.5m on average below the floor layers of the mansion's median level (Figure 27). To construct the garden, a large portion of the eastern *cavea* of Herod's Circus had to be dismantled and the area of the former arena had to be cleaned of the soil and the city's refuse layers accumulated there since the facility stopped to function in the mid-3rd century AD (Porath 2013: 161). The massive retaining walls at the north, south and east, bordered the Garden from three sides. Though the western part of the Low Garden was completely destroyed it may assume that it was bordered from west by a wall or fence.

The access from the median level to the Low Garden was via corridor F and stairway G1 (2.3m wide) descending along the eastern retaining wall, then turning—at the low landing—toward the west, to the sidewalk G2 (more than 26m long, 1.5m wide) and adjacent pergola G3 (more than 26m long, 5.4m wide), both oriented east-west. The rectangular ashlar pillars of the pergola supported a roof, probably of wooden beams. These pillars and the semi-dome apsidal niche (radius 3.3m), at the eastern end of the pergola, were covered with marble slabs. Each pillar had four square cavities, two on each of its eastern and western facets. The lower ones were close to the stylobate, the upper ones in about 1.8m higher. We assume that the cavities held wooden lattice partitions. The pergola was paved with *opus sectile* mosaic composed of white, gray and cipollino marbles and pink limestone (Figure 28).

The sidewalk G2 was paved in marble slabs or *opus sectile* mosaic, of which only the bedding and a pair of grayish marble pieces survived. The rectangular cavities cut—in a

<sup>4</sup> Similar parrots, though differently arranged, appear in late fifth-early sixth century AD mosaics from Daphne, Syria (Levi 1971: pls. CXXXV:b,c,d; CXXXVII:c,d), and Madaba, Jordan (Piccirillo 1993: 115, 118, figs. 104, 119). For the connection of the beribboned birds

with Sasanian art, see (Kondoleon 2001: 137; Levi 1971: 358). Beribboned birds also appear in the border of the mosaic in the nave of Horvat Berachot church (Tsafirir *et al.* 1979: 306–307, fig. 19).

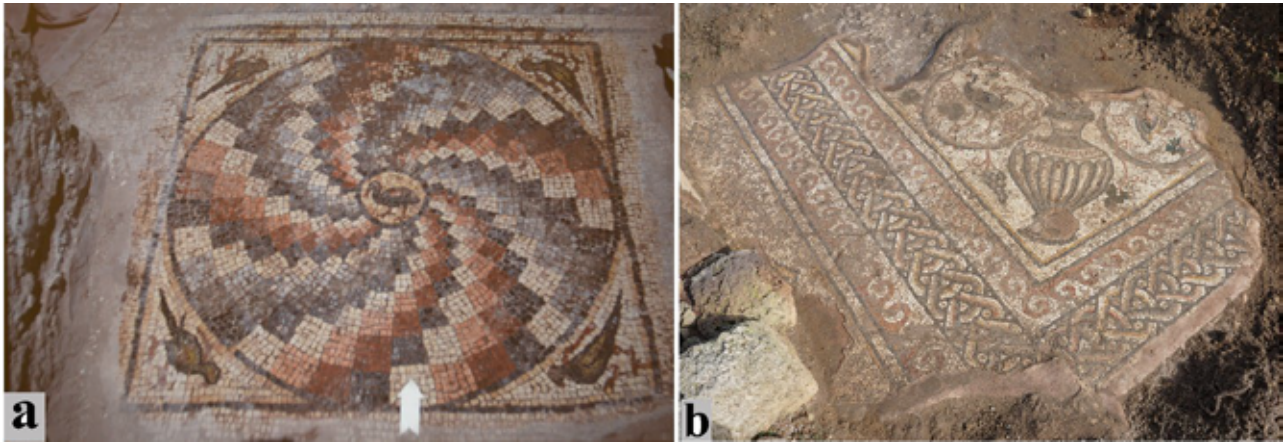


Figure 26. a: Tessellated mosaic emblem on T3, view to the north; b. Tessellated mosaic on T5, view to the north-east (P. Gendelman).



Figure 27. Low Garden area during excavation, view to the east (A. Peri; courtesy of IAA).

distance of 2m from each other—into the narrow stylobate, that bordered the sidewalk from the north, held screen posts. Four complete marble screen-posts (25×25cm, each 1.1m high) and several fragments of marble relief carved screens were found nearby (Figure 29).

The rest of the area of the Low Garden, north and south of the pergola G2-3, was filled with dark soil layer apt for plant growing. During the first phase the garden was watered from a plastered channel that ran westward parallel to the Garden's northern wall foundation, and fed from a vaulted cistern beneath G1. In the second phase a fountain within a semicircular niche was added into the northern wall, a rectangular basin was built below and a new watering channel, which ran westward along the fountain basin where it received its overflow, was

constructed (Figure 30); from the basin, the channel turned to the south, toward the southern part of the garden.

### The Mansion's Southern Upper Level

The area between the peristyle court P, the Marble Court H, and the southern sidewalk of *Decumanus* S4 was not excavated apart from a few probes (Figure 31). The results showed that this area was elevated 80-90cm above the median level's floors, and was accessed from the peristyle court P through stairway P5, and probably also from *Decumanus* S4. Room I1, partially exposed south of P5, may have served as antechamber paved with plain tessellated mosaic. Other remains suggest that at least part of the area was occupied by a bathhouse. One compartment I2, partially excavated south of rooms H5-6, has on its north-western corner a large pool I2a





Figure 28. *Opus sectile* mosaic pavement on G3, view to the south-east (P. Gendelman).



Figure 29. Screen posts and screens plates from the Low Garden (P. Gendelman).

(3.7×3.7m), built of bricks and paved with marble slabs (Figure 32a). This compartment may have served as a frigidarium. Private bath was common feature in elite houses of the period (cf., Baldini 2014: 163; Baldini Lippolis 2001: 64–66; Ćurčić 1993: 70–71; Ellis 2007: 11). To the west of the pool there are remains of a large *piscina*—fishpond—I3 with concrete floor and waterproof plastered walls. The *piscina* consisted of a central partition divided by channels into three isles. Each had a row of pottery vessels inserted into each of its long lower face.

The pots were employed as *cellae*, dens for spawning and protecting small fishes (Figure 32b). The water supply to the *piscina* came from the pool in I2. During the second phase the channels between the isles were blocked, a perpendicular partition was added to the northern part of the piscine, dividing it into two pools, and the southern was dismantled. It seems, given the remaining *cellae* at the western of the two pools, that the reduced *piscina* continued to function during the second phase.

The small probe south of I2 yielded remains of a hypocaust heated room I4, which was part of a tepidarium/caldarium. The small private latrine I5 (3.2×2.9m) to the west was paved with tessellated plain mosaic floor, and had deep washing channels along its northern, western, and southern sides. The channels were supplied with water from the caldarium/tepidarium. The last element which may have been connected to the mansion is room I6 (7×6.7m) adjoined from the west to the south-west corner of the latrine I5. The function of the room paved with multicolored tessellated mosaic of rows of dentilled squares inscribed with florets, is unclear (Figure 33).

### The End of the Mansion

Sometime at the early 7th century AD, the owners of the mansion initiated an extensive project of renovation. As part of the project's preparations one room B3, which originally functioned as antechamber between the northern and the southern units, was turned into an *opus sectile* mosaic workshop (Gersht and Gendelman 2019: 57; Porath 2008: 1661). Its northern openings were blocked and a stepped ashlar device was installed on its north-

eastern corner. Dozens of elaborate opus-sectile panels stored there. The renovation of the mansion interrupted as result of one of the major events that stroke Caesarea in the 7th century—the AD 614–628 Sasanian conquest of the province or the conquest of Caesarea by the Muslims in AD 640/641—and was never finished. Finally, the mansion was abandoned by the owners for good.

In the 2nd half of the 7th century AD, the house was stripped out of most of its expensive materials—wood, marble, and metal. Many of the marble decoration items





Figure 30. Low Garden compartments G1, 2, 3 and fountain G4, view to the north-east (P. Gendelman).



Figure 31. Mansion's southern upper level during excavation, view to the north (A. Peri; courtesy of IAA).

and architectural members found their way to the two limekilns built within the northern and eastern apses of the



Figure 32. a: Compartment I2, view to the south-west; b. Piscina I3 with cellae, view to the south (A. Peri; courtesy of IAA).

Triconch Triclinium, where they turned to lime. The Porticoed Court A became a sorting yard for ashlar and the Low Garden G became a sorting yard for marbles, all were taken from the ruins of the complex (see Figures 5, 30). During the late 7th-8th centuries AD, parts of the mansion, among them the peristyle court P, were used as irrigated agricultural plots. The final use of the area was during the 9th-12th centuries AD, when the area was used as burial ground by the Islamic inhabitants of the town of Qaysarya.

### Discussion and Conclusions

As the only extensively exposed upper-class residential complex, Insula W2S4 mansion provides valuable information about Caesarea elite dwellings. The size of the complex, the division into two units and the luxurious decoration indicate that the owners of the mansion were among the wealthiest and most influential Caesarea inhabitants, which held an office in the city council and/or in the provincial administration. The headless statue of an official found in the southern portico P3 of the peristyle court reinforces this interpretation (see Figure 19).<sup>5</sup>

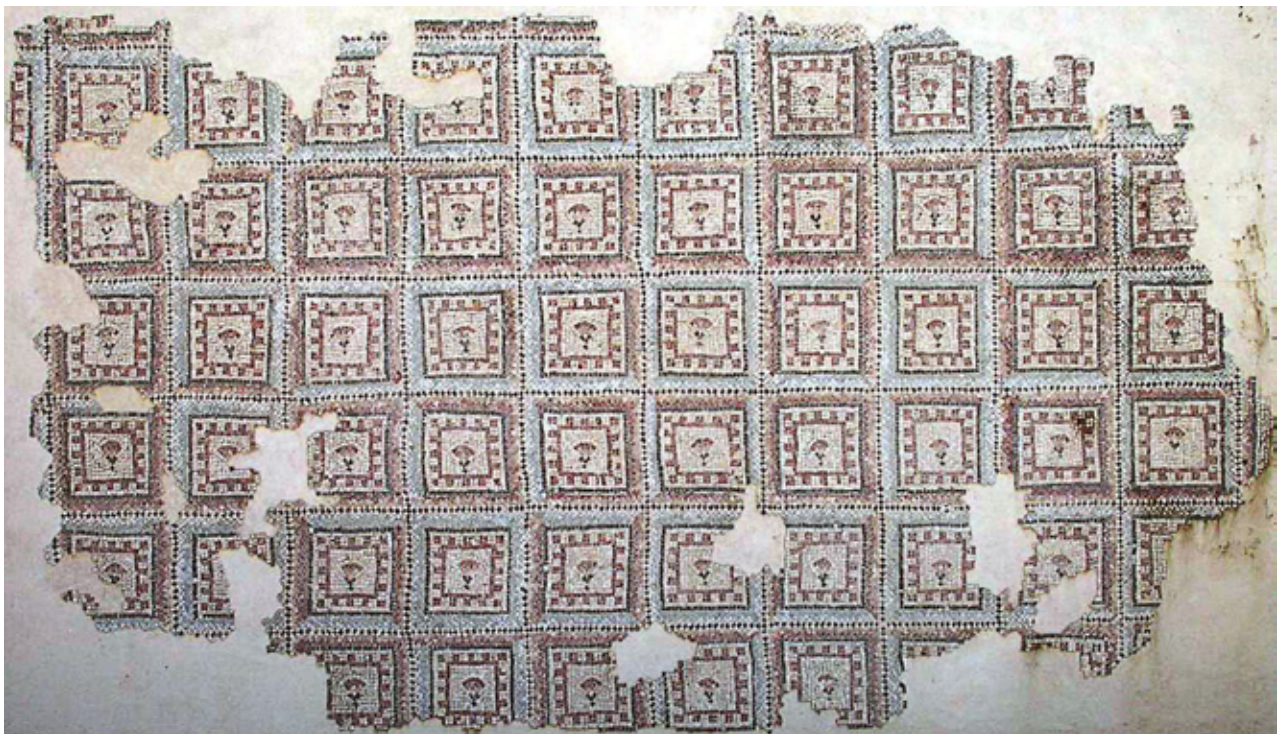


Figure 33. Tessellated mosaic from I6 (N. Davidov; courtesy of IAA).

<sup>5</sup> On the statue see Gersht 1996: 103–108.

The function of each of the mansion's units—the north and the south—can be deduced from the size, components and materials employed in both phases of the complex's existence. The northern unit had a large *horreum* (S1-28) on the west since the beginning; in the second phase the eastern half of the unit changed its function from living wing to additional *horreum*, and so the storage capacity of the unit more than doubled.

*Horrea* are known from other Caesarea elite dwellings. The ground floor of the Late Antique *Praetorium* functioned, at least during certain phases of its long existence, as a large *horreum* (Lehman 1999: 144–145; Patrìch 1996: 150–153). The large *horreum* in Insula W2S5 was likely part of the mansion occupying this insula in Late Antiquity (Porath 1996: 117). Large storage facilities as part of elite mansions are known from other cities than Caesarea; e.g., the storage facilities in the Palatial Mansion at Sagalassos (Waelkens *et al.* 2005), and the episcopal residence of Laurentius I, the archbishop of Milano (AD 489–510/12; Marano 2007: 111). In comparison with others, the *horreum* in Insula W2S4 is one of the best preserved *horrea* among the dwelling storage facilities. The necessity for such storage in private mansions was contingent on the agricultural products being a significant part of the owner's income. There are the evidences that at least some of the *bouleutai*—local senatorial class—of Late Antique Caesarea were rich landowners (Holum 1996: 616–617). Mamilianus of Caesarea (mid-6th century AD), for example, owned extensive estate (Holum 1996: 625–626); likewise, the Caesarean rhetor Evangelus, possessed the entire coastal village of Porphyreon near Mount Carmel (Hirschfeld 1997: 36).

Whereas the northern part of the mansion functioned as a private administrative and economic unit, the southern part functioned as the owners' living and hosting unit, of which the most conspicuous features are the open courts—P and H—and dining rooms—T, H8 and G3. The later reflect a luxurious, perhaps even extravagant, style of living of owners using several dining rooms diverse in shape and dimensions and apt for different circumstances of dining.

The combination of courts—either surrounded by rooms or porticoes—with exedra-triclinia are characteristic of Late Antique elite dwellings. Among the surviving examples are those from Villa Romana del Casale near Piazza Armerina, the Palace at Split, and the *dux* palace at Dura Europos (Baldini Lippolis 2001: 42, figs. 2, 3a-b, 8). Likewise, was the triconch triclinium characteristic of luxurious palatial dwellings in the western and eastern Roman Empire alike (Ceylan 2007:275; Morvillez 1995; Özgenel 2007: 240–242, 253–254, fig.1a). The lavishly decorated triconch triclinium in Insula W2S4 was undoubtedly furnished with three *stibadia* coaches and likely served its owners for social banquets, a common practice among Late antique nobilities (Dunbabin 2003: 169–174). Of the seventeen fragments of tabletops uncovered in Insula W2S4, three belonged to the *sigma* type, which was the preferred type of table for triconch triclinia (Gendelman and Gersht 2019: 136).

Although combining elements known from other elite houses at the time, the arrangement of these elements in the southern unit of the Insula W2S4 mansion is rather unique, adapted to the topography of the insula and its surroundings. The Low Garden is the most distinctive feature, not only among other elite Late Antique dwellings gardens at Caesarea (e.g., Gendelman and 'Ad 2020; Patrìch 1999: 93), but also among other cities in the region and elsewhere. This elegant facility — on its long pergola with wooden lattice and climbing grapevine, marble screens, spacious niche for outdoor *stibadium*, running water in fountain and irrigating channel, trees and other plants, and uninterrupted sea view — was undoubtedly among the most impressive private gardens of Late Antique Caesarea.

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# Champlevé Reliefs from Caesarea Maritima

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*Large number of fragmentary champlevé reliefs came from the city of Caesarea; some of which date to the Roman, the other to the Byzantine period. Most of the fragments are small, and only a few can be joined together to form larger pieces. By using a selected number of examples this article demonstrates the diversities in style, workmanship, patterns and functions of the 2nd to 6th century AD Caesarea champlevé reliefs. First, the opus sectile examples are dealt with, then the pilaster capitals, the depictions of human and animal figures, the detached panels and friezes bearing floral and geometric patterns, and finally two furniture items are discussed. The multiplicity and variety of motifs of which some have no comparisons among the published champlevé reliefs from other sites, and the fact that spolia was used for carving some of the plaques, suggest that the Caesarea champlevé reliefs were locally carved.*

KEYWORDS: CAESAREA MARITIMA; ROMAN CHAMPLEV'E RELIEFS; BYZANTINE CHAMPLEV'E RELIEFS; CHAMPLEV'E; FIGURAL DEPICTIONS; FLORAL PATTERNS; FURNITURE; GEOMETRIC PATTERNS; OPUS SECTILE; PILASTER CAPITALS; AMBO.

## Introduction

With the help of Peter Gendelman, I managed to trace over one hundred low-relief fragments carved in the champlevé technique.<sup>1</sup> The earliest—yet only a few—are from the Roman period, the majority date to the Byzantine period. Most of the fragments are small, and only a number can be joined together to form larger pieces. The fragments came from all over the territory of the ancient city of Caesarea, found in excavated and unexcavated areas; many are random finds and have no record as to their findspot. The lack of knowledge of the original context of each of the pieces in antiquity and the diversity in styles and workmanship withhold any reliable proposition regarding their precise dating.

In the champlevé technique the relief is low, the surface smoothed or polished, and the background recessed (usually about 2–3mm) by uneven point-chisel strokes and filled with colored mixtures (Boyd 2007: 236). The details of the depicted elements are incised and were likewise filled with colored material. It seems, although not yet examined, that the upper face of some of the pieces were gilded.<sup>2</sup> This two-dimensional treatment endowed the relief the impression of a painting. The technique was widely used in the region, mainly in the late Roman and Byzantine periods.<sup>3</sup> Megaw noted that, 'the comparative rarity of the technique outside the Levant suggests that it may have originated there' (Megaw 1974: 61). In Caesarea, it was employed to ornate *opus sectile* pieces, revetment plaques—mostly friezes and pilaster capitals—doorposts and furniture. The repertory of themes is

diverse; it includes floral, geometric and figural motifs. The colors observed are blue and red.

Apart from several *opus sectile* pieces made of limestone, all other Caesarea champlevé reliefs are of marble. The marble colors vary from white/whitish, sometimes with yellowish or grayish veins, to gray/grayish with or without darker gray veins. The thickness of the plaques ranges from 1.7 to 4.08cm. The reverse side is either roughly smoothed, or polished, or more often only coarsely leveled by means of point-chisel strokes or tooth-chisel. In a number of fragments, the reverse side is molded; a clear evidence of using *spolia* for local carving of champlevé reliefs.

Although the frame of this publication does not allow the inclusion of a catalogue of the whole corpus, the examples dealt with below are more than enough to provide the reader with a wide range knowledge regarding the Caesarea champlevé reliefs between the 2nd and 6th century AD.

## Opus Sectile

In Byzantine Caesarea, walls of private, public and semi-public buildings were ornamented with *opus sectile* plaques. The semi-public complex occupying insula W2S3 in itself yielded thousands of *sectile* pieces, among them a number of floral and figural shapes—human and animal (Figure 1: 1, 2)—that had their features accentuated in the champlevé technique. In a number of shapes—mostly palmettes—the blue and red filling survived (Figure 1: 3). Three of these *sectile* pieces were analyzed by SEM-EDS

<sup>1</sup> All photographs but one was taken by Peter Gendelman; Figure 12: 1a was taken by Assaf Peretz. Reconstructions—Figures 3b, 8: 1b, 8: 2b-c, 9: b, 13: 1b—are by Tania Meltsen.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Boyd 2000: 220; 2007: 236 and note 8.

<sup>3</sup> Large quantities were found in Cyprus, Syria and Sardis in Asia Minor (Boyd 2007; Rautman 2020; Stillwell 1941; Weitzmann 1941). A list of fragments known till 2007 is published as an appendix in Boyd's chapter on the champlevé revetments found in the episcopal basilica precinct at Kourion.



Figure 1. *Opus sectile* pieces.

(Quanta 200FEG ESEM + Oxford EDS Analysis), and three by EDXRF (ARL – QUANT’X, Rhodium detector and Beryllium window).<sup>4</sup> The analysis of the blue dye showed high percentage of Silicon and Copper, which accord with the composition of Egyptian blue ( $\text{CaCuSi}_4\text{O}_{10}$  -  $\text{CaO} \cdot \text{CuO} \cdot 4\text{SiO}_2$ ); the red dye was found to have been red ochre (hematite,  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3$ ).

Two medallions uncovered in the small bath caldarium of this semi-public complex have their outer frame shaped as laurel wreath in the champlevé technique (Figure 2). The recessed areas between the leaves were filled with red ochre, of which a very thin layer remain (Gersht and Gendelman 2019: 61, Figure 7a).

Another *sectile* piece, found in a well in the area of the mansion occupying insula W2S4, is ornamented with Maltese cross in the champlevé technique (Figure 1: 4).

### Pilaster Capitals

Over twenty fragments belong with the group of pilaster capitals.<sup>5</sup> Except for two fragments, not one duplicates the other. Ten of the twelve fragments that preserved part of their abacus, share the ‘mirrored trumpet’ feature. The ‘trumpets’ decorate several champlevé pilaster capitals from Antioch; yet unlike the plain trumpets shown in full profile on the Caesarea capitals, the ones from Antioch are ornate and show their mouth (Stillwell 1941: Pl. 26, Nos. 461–462, 473, 477).<sup>6</sup> The term was first used by Stillwell, who suggested, based on the resemblance to the side view of the Ionic volute, that the ‘trumpets’ probably derived from the Ionic capital (Stillwell 1941: 130).

Most of the Caesarea fragments bear stylized acanthus leaves, composed of three to five serrations on each lobe. In four fragments, the depiction of the acanthus is

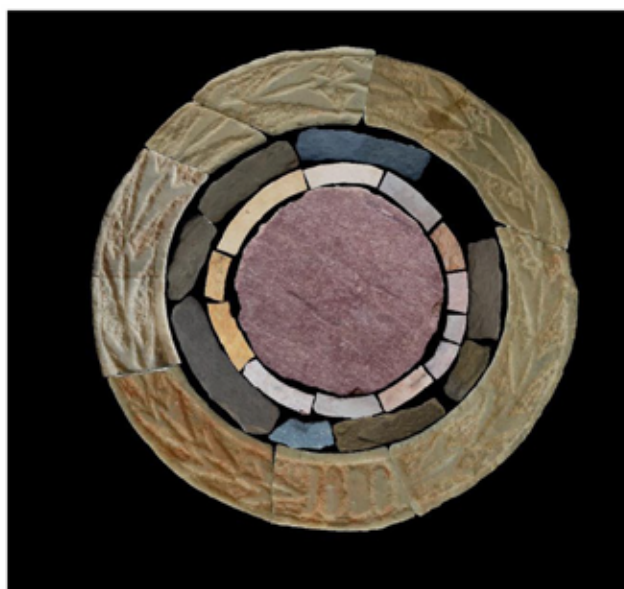


Figure 2. *Opus sectile* medallion, small bath caldarium, Insula W2S3.

somewhat more naturalistic. Only one fragment preserved almost all of its height including part of one ‘trumpet’ and a section of its base ornamented with chevron Figure 3: 1). The ornamented base of another fragment has successive row of rhombuses and circles Figure 3: 2). This capital—when intact—had a complete acanthus leaf amid half leaves, one on each side. Most of the fragments are not enough informative to enable the estimation of the dimensions of the intact capitals. Capital 1 in Figure 3 was no less than 30cm wide.<sup>7</sup> About 34cm was the width of capital 3 in Figure 3,<sup>8</sup> and about 42.5cm the width of capital 4 in Figure 3.<sup>9</sup> Capital 5 in Figure 3 was much

<sup>4</sup> The analyses were carried out by Dr. Ahuva Beeri (EDXRF) during her doctoral studies at the Tel Aviv University and by Dr. Zahava Barkay (SEM-EDS), The Wolfson Applied Materials Research Center, Tel-Aviv University. The study of the *sectile* pieces was made possible through the support of the Israel Science Foundation, Grant No. 31/10 awarded to Peter Gendelman and Rivka Gersht.

<sup>5</sup> One was published by Patrich 2011: 247, Fig. 167: 13a.

<sup>6</sup> Additional difference is the inclusion of figural images between the acanthus leaves in the Antioch examples.

<sup>7</sup> H 30cm, W 13.9cm, Th 3.7cm. IAA Inv. No. 98-7574.

<sup>8</sup> H 18.2cm, W 25.3cm. IAA Inv. No. 55–1010. The capital recalls a one with plain ‘trumpets’ from Jerusalem (Rosen-Ayalon 1974: Pl. 51b).

<sup>9</sup> H 19cm, W 16cm.



Figure 3. Pilaster capitals.

larger<sup>10</sup>—about 55cm wide—and had two volutes, four helices and probably three acanthus leaves.

Three fragments bear crosses: One is either *Crux Ansata*, which may indicate Egyptian influence, or *Staurogram*<sup>11</sup>

(Figure 3: 5); either way the cross suggests a 4th century AD date. The two other crosses are Saltire (Figure 3: 6) and Maltese (Figure 3: 4). The *Crux Ansata*/*Staurogram* and the Saltire are located right above the trumpets meeting point; the location of the Maltese cross between





Figure 4. Figural depictions: human figures.

the volute and the helix suggest that another cross inhabited the right half of this capital.

Only one fragment (Figure 3: 7) retained a significant amount of the red ochre that filled part of the sunken areas of its background; the rest was assumedly filled with some other color.<sup>12</sup> In other capitals only minor remains of color preserved (e.g., Figure 3: 2).

### Figural Depictions

The champlevé reliefs of this category include depictions of male images, animals, and a single fragment of a female figure. They also include the earliest and latest examples of the whole corpus. The three earliest examples—dating to the beginning of the 2nd century AD—had already been discussed in previous publications (Gendelman and Gersht 2017: 39; Gersht and Gendelman 2019: 53–54, Figure 3),

I'll therefore only mention them here. They belonged to a hunting frieze that decorated the pergola of the peristyle court of the Dioscuri Domus, which occupied insula W2S3 from first to 3rd century AD (Figure 4: 1, 2). The fragment, showing part of a red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), had been lost. The two other fragments show a beardless youth holding a sword in his raised right arm, and a mature bearded male in a similar posture.

A fragment of a winged Eros (Figure 4: 3)<sup>13</sup> was found in the amphitheater built at Caesarea in the beginning of the 2nd century AD. Only part of the right shoulder and wing, the neck and the hair crowned with *diādēma*, survived. The dimensions of the head suggest that the figure reached the height of no less than 70cm, if standing. Given the repertory of themes in relief carving, which decorated Roman amphitheatres,<sup>14</sup> it is plausible that the fragment belonged to a large mythological panel. Eros' curls recall

<sup>10</sup> H 12.3cm, W 13.5cm, Th 2.2cm. Sdot-Yam Museum Inv. No. CM.AM.18.

<sup>11</sup> On the *crux ansata* / *Ankh* cross in Egyptian contexts, see Muc 2008 and Bowen 2014. On the *Staurogram*, see Muc 2008: 97, note 2.

<sup>12</sup> Gendelman and Gersht 2010: 31, Fig. 5. A fragment with similar design, but with minor traces of color, came from Insula W2S4.

<sup>13</sup> H 14.5cm, W 12.2cm, Th 3.5cm.

<sup>14</sup> For examples from the amphitheatres at Capua, Nîmes, Arles and Lepcis Magna, see Bomgardner 2000 with references.



Figure 5. Figural depictions: animals.

the curls of the bearded hunter from the Dioscuri Domus. Yet, as only a small fragment survived, it is difficult to offer an accurate date. The amphitheater ceased to function by the end of the 4th century, hence any date between the 2nd and late 4th century AD is in theory possible.

The latest example—dating to the 6th century AD—was found in the southern sidewalk of Decumanus S3. It shows a haloed male in *orant* posture, flanked by schematic trees and crosses (Figure 4: 4).<sup>15</sup> He is dressed in a long-sleeved short tunic and a wide long rectangular scarf (*stole*). A single trimming stripe ornate each of the tunic's sleeves, and two large roundels ornate the tunic's edge at about the knees level. The scarf—like the one worn by Bishop Apollinaris, the patron saint of S. Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna (Kitzinger 1980: Figs. 185–186)—wraps the upper body and forearms; its middle part sags down towards the knee as the ends hang down at the sides of the body. Despite the crude workmanship, the intention must have been to depict a Caesarea ecclesiastic individual or a saint. Fragmentary champlevé depictions of beardless and bearded haloed males from the so-called Martyrion at Seleucia Pieria, the seaport of Antioch, are identified as saints (Stillwell 1941: 129–130, Nos. 449, 450, 454, Pl. 25; Weitzmann 1941: 145, Nos. 449, 450, 454), but since these—like the Caesarea example—are not accompanied by inscriptions, the identity of the saints remain enigmatic.

Three champlevé fragments of unknown findspot, in the Sdot-Yam Museum, show inhabited scrolls. In one, the scroll encircled a figure wearing a Phrygian (?) cap, of whom only the face and left shoulder remain (Figure 4: 5).<sup>16</sup> In the second fragment, a somewhat beefier scroll enclosed a cow in right profile, whose head faces the viewer (Figure 5: 1). Of the scroll in the third relief, a single curving shoot remains at the upper right side of the fragment, next to a partly preserved common-pheasant (Figure 5: 2).<sup>17</sup> Another champlevé fragment, whose findspot is unknown, shows a bull attacked by a lion; the bull preserved its frontal half of body, of the lion only the left forelimb remains (Figure 5: 3).

## Floral and Geometric Patterns

### A: Friezes

Each of the aforementioned inhabited scrolls was undoubtedly part of a frieze; either used to decorate an opening, or the upper border of a plain marble revetment. In addition, the corpus of champlevé reliefs includes fragments of floral, geometric, and composite—floral and geometric—panels, of which at least some were part of friezes.

Two fragments of the same frieze (Figure 6: 1, 2) came from the semi-public complex in insula W2S3. The frieze is ornamented with beautiful scroll—composed of acanthus leaves, flowers, and half fruit-capsules containing three oval seeds—and shoots with leaves, flowers and berries. The height of the frieze is between 28cm and 30cm.

From the apsidal room of the administrative unit of the same complex came an intact plaque of a geometric frieze (Figure 6: 3a, b).<sup>18</sup> The plaque's ornamentation includes five horizontal bands; the central consists of swastika-meander inhabited with Maltese cross, which displays evidence of intentional mutilation. The bands above and below consist of adjacent circles shaped of four spindles each, and additional two outer plain bands. Fragments of related panels found nearby, probably belonged to the same frieze, which ornamented the room where the intact plaque was found (Gersht and Gendelman 2019: 62, Figure 8a). Champlevé reliefs with similar adjacent circles are familiar from Seleucia Pieria (Stillwell 1941: 129 Cat. No. 447, Pl. 24 and Figure 97 on p. 133).

The swastika-meander decorates several additional fragments (Figure 7:1), yet these are inhabited with four-petaled flower instead of the cross, and devoid the bands of adjacent circles. One exhibit traces of red ochre filling. Of the seven fragments that came from insula W2S4, a particular large one was found lying on the floor of the western apse of the mansion's triconch triclinium (Figure 7: 2). Its pattern consisted of squares or rectangles

<sup>15</sup> H 18.9cm, W 15.5cm, Th 3.1cm.

<sup>16</sup> 15.9cm, W 14.9cm, Th 2.05cm. IAA Inv. No. 98-7902.

<sup>17</sup> H 12cm, W 13.5cm, Th 4.03cm. IAA Inv. No. 98-7905.

<sup>18</sup> H 36.8cm, W 33cm, Th 4.08cm.



Figure 6. Floral (1–2) and geometric (3a–b) friezes, insula W2S3.

bordered by swastika-meander inhabited with four-petaled flower and outer plain band. This arrangement seems to be a variation of the double latchkey meander separating figural rectangles on a number of champlévé panels from Seleucia Pieria (Stillwell 1941: Pls. 20–21, Nos. 395, 397, 401, 404). The same type of four-petaled-flower is carved on a fragment of unknown findspot in the Sdot-Yam Museum.<sup>19</sup> In this fragment the background, not the flower, is recessed and was filled with colored material (Figure 7: 3).

The same arrangement as in the aforementioned panel from insula W2S4 (Figure 7: 2), appears on a fragmentary plaque of unknown findspot in the Sdot-Yam Museum;<sup>20</sup> but instead of the swastika-meander border, the squares or rectangles are surrounded by ivy scroll (Figure 7: 4). Similar depictions of ivy scrolls frame Roman and Byzantine tessellated mosaics. The ivy scrolls in the 4th century AD pavement in the basilica adjacent to the Portico of Tiberius at Aphrodisias, Caria (Campbell 1991: Pls. 101–102), is almost identical to the depiction in the champlévé relief. A more stylized is the depiction of the motif in the 5th–6th century AD mosaic decorating the east-west corridor (F4) of the mansion occupying insula

W2S4 at Caesarea (see Gendelman and Porat this volume Figure 14). The ivy also decorates a fragment of unknown findspot in the Sdot-Yam Museum (Figure 7: 5).<sup>21</sup> In this example, the ivy is in the form of a woody plant. The piece was either part of a vertical frieze decorating a pilaster or a doorpost. It recalls the *opus sectile* ivy plant sprouting from a vase that had once graced the western wall of the small bath *caldarium* of the semi-public complex occupying insula W2S3 (Gersht and Gendelman 2019: Figure 7a).<sup>22</sup>

Two joining fragments came from one of the vaults of Augustus and Dea Roma Temple Platform, and probably belonged to the decoration of the octagonal church or of one of its relating buildings (Figure 7: 6).<sup>23</sup> The design includes acanthus scroll and ivy shoots, bordered by four plain bands; the sunken areas still keep remains of the red filling.

## B. Square and Rectangular Plaques

Several other fragments came from the area of the Temple Platform vaults. One belonged to a square plaque—37.5 x 37.5cm when intact—which was ornamented with a

<sup>19</sup> 19 x 20cm, Th. 3.57cm. Inv. No. CM.AM.7.

<sup>20</sup> H 17.5cm, W 25.5cm, Th 2.8cm (maximum). Inv. No. CM.AM. 8.

<sup>21</sup> H 13.1cm, W 20.3cm, Th 4cm. IAA Inv. No. 98–7573.

<sup>22</sup> Recomposed by Rivka Gersht and Peter Gendelman within the frame of their research supported by the Israel science Foundation, Grant No. 31/10.

<sup>23</sup> H 17.8cm, W 32.4cm, Th 2.4–2.5cm.





Figure 7. Geometric and floral patterns.

circular design (Figure 8: 1a).<sup>24</sup> The pattern consisted of a medallion with an outer border of spaced chevrons (or fishbone pattern) and an inner frame of alternating spindles and scales; both encircled a cross with flaring arms and four-petaled flower at its center. Each of the cross's arms was inscribed with one petal and a flared trifid lotus; the spaces between the arms were filled with trefoil flowers (Figure 8: 1b). Although of entirely different configuration, the Caesarea square plaque recalls the plaques uncovered in Hagios Philon, Amathous and Kourion (Boyd 1999: 55, 57, Figs. 8–12; 2007: 270–274, Nos. 116–122). The latter, according to Boyd, could have decorated either the wall of the north aisle of the episcopal basilica, or the north wall of the nave, in a manner similar to the *opus sectile* panels at St. Demetrios in Thessaloniki, where they embellish the zone of plain marble revetment above the nave arcade. At St. Vitale in Ravenna, the square plaques decorate the lower zone of the apse (Boyd 1989: 1836, 1838, Figure 17; 1999: 55; 2007: 270). The Kourion, the St. Demetrios and the St. Vitale examples demonstrate how the Caesarean champlevé plaque—providing it was one of a series of independent plaques and not of a frieze—could fit into the decorative program of the Caesarea octagonal church.

From the same area came a small fragment, which was cut out of a larger plaque, probably to be used as floor tile

(Figure 8: 2a).<sup>25</sup> The design of the complete plaque consisted of a four-spindles-circle, a one cm wide ring within the poised-concave square, and four leaves, one in each spandrel.<sup>26</sup> The color residues indicate that the poised-concave square, including the recessed area within the ring, was filled with Egyptian blue; the rest of the recessed areas were filled with red ochre (Figure 8: 2b). As only part of the plaque's frame remains, and no evidence for more plaques of the kind is available, it is hard to decide if the fragment belonged to a solid frieze composed of a sequence of circles,<sup>27</sup> or of a small independent plaque, either bordered on two or on all of its four sides. In all other Caesarea examples of champlevé friezes ornamented with circles formed by spindles, the poised-concave squares and the spandrels lack ornamentation and they are always part of a more elaborate design. It is thus possible to suggest, based on the ornamental elements within the poised-concave square and at one of the spandrels, of which only the tip of a leaf remains, that the fragment belonged to an independent plaque. If framed all around it could have been a central motif of a larger emblem, perhaps like in the above-mentioned examples from St. Demetrios in Thessaloniki; if only the upper and lower ends were framed the relief could have been one of several, composing a frieze (Figure 8: 2c).

<sup>24</sup> H 16.5cm, W 14.5cm, Th 3–3.3cm.

<sup>25</sup> 13 x 11.7cm, Th 2cm.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the basic pattern of spindles-circle, wide ring within poised-concave square in the mosaic of room 2, the Bird's Mosaic mansion (Reich 1985: 211, Pl. LIII: 1).

<sup>27</sup> The closest comparable examples are narrow friezes with a disc within the poised-concave square from St. Philip Church in Hierapolis, Turkey (Pedone 2016: 501–503, Figs. 1–2) and from Seleucia Pieira, Syria (Stillwell 1941: 133, Fig. 97); the leaf is absent in both.



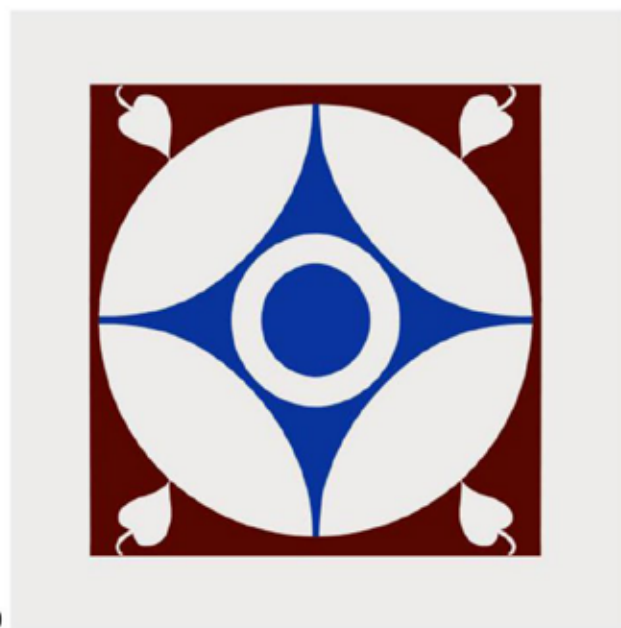
1a



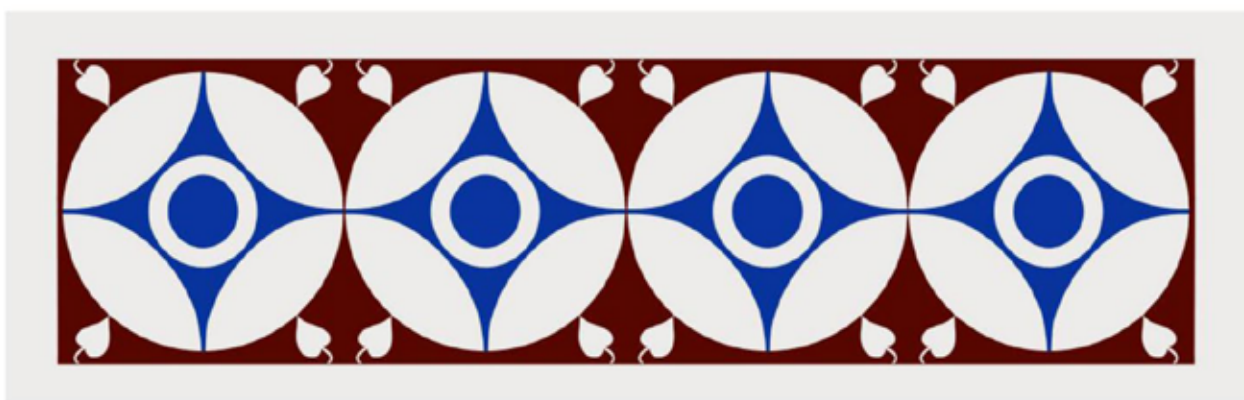
1b



2a



2b



2c

Figure 8. Square plaques from the Temple Platform area.

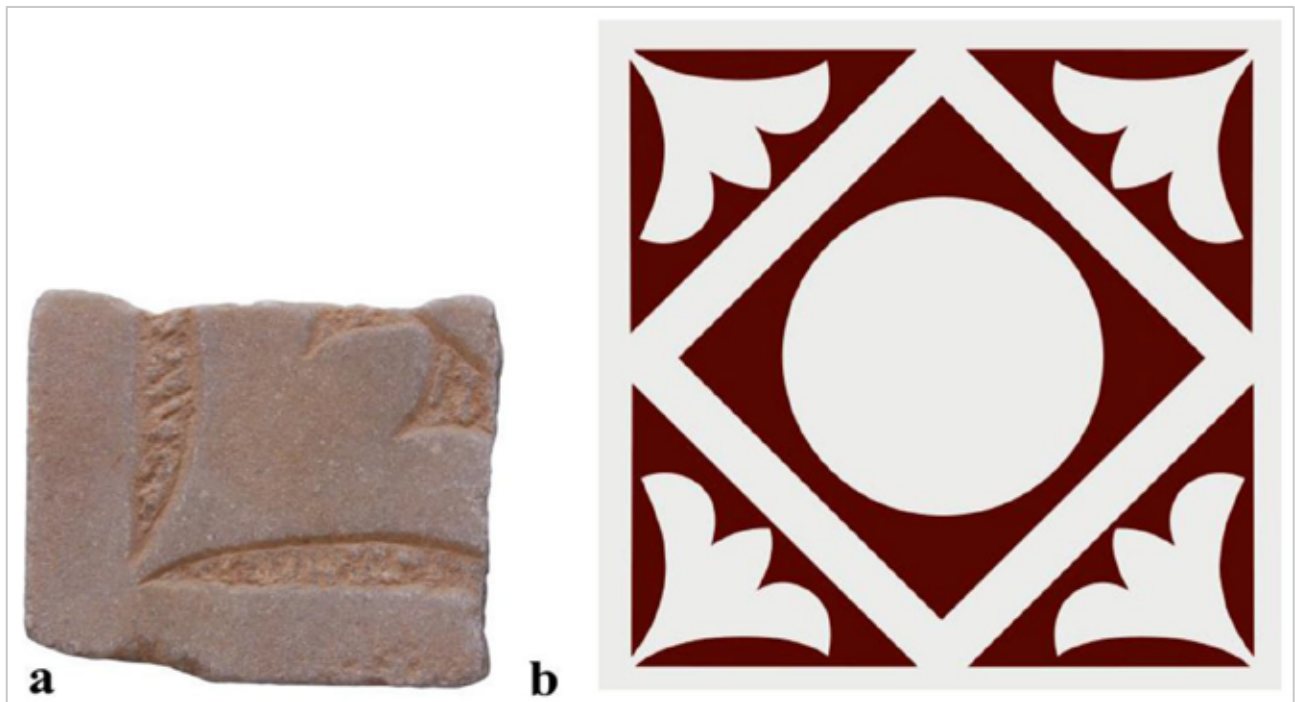


Figure 9. Square plaque, IAA 1992–1998 excavation, surface find.



Figure 10. Lozenge rectangular reliefs.

The same perhaps holds true regarding the square plaque of which only one corner, decorated with flared trifid lotus, remains (Figure 9).<sup>28</sup> When intact the plaque—26 x 26cm—had four lotus flowers, one at each corner, facing the arms of a poised square, which likely inhabited a medallion inscribed with geometric or floral design and possibly also a cross.<sup>29</sup>

Interesting is the relatively large number—six examples—of rectangular panels inscribed with lozenge/rhombus.<sup>30</sup> They varied in dimensions and inner design, and were likely differently used, either as independent plaques or as

frieze-members. The fragment found in Insula W2S3 is about half the size of the intact plaque, and had only an inscribed circle at the lozenge's center as decoration (Figure 10: 1).<sup>31</sup> Another fragment preserved part of the lozenge occupied by a smaller one (Figure 10: 2). The globule at the acute angle of the fragmentary panel uncovered in one of the vaults of Augustus and Dea Roma Temple Platform (Figure 10: 3),<sup>32</sup> suggests that the inner lozenge had sculpted ornamentation.

The three other examples are more elaborate. The fragment in the Sdot-Yam Museum, whose findspot is unknown,

<sup>28</sup> 7.8 x 8.1cm, Th 1.44cm.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. the plaque uncovered in Area KK (Patrich 2011: 247, Fig. 167: 15).

<sup>30</sup> A fragment published by Patrich (2011: 247, Fig. 167: 13b) seems to be an additional example.

<sup>31</sup> H 19.44cm, L 22.3 cm, Th 3.4 cm.

<sup>32</sup> 14.5 x 18cm, Th 3.8cm.



(Figure 11: 1)<sup>33</sup> preserved part of the floral decoration in one of the four triangular spandrels of the panel. Eight matching fragments remain of another large rectangular panel, measuring about 60 x 84cm when intact (Figure 11: 2).<sup>34</sup> It was found reused to cover a gutter in the southwest corner of the northern court of the late 6th century AD mansion in Insula W2S4, but previously it was likely decorating one of the mansion's walls (Gersht and Gendelman 2019: Figure 8b). The workmanship is rather good but the overall design was inaccurately followed. Each of the patterns within the rectangular panel is set between plain borders. The twisted inner lozenge, enclosed by a larger one, inhabits a four-petaled flower of which two are elongated. The large lozenge and each of the triangular spandrels are bordered by rows of spindles unevenly arranged in zigzag. Each of the triangular spandrels contains a double-headed axe. Axes appear in



Figure 11. Lozenge rectangular reliefs (cont.): (1) unknown findspot; (2) Insula W2S4.

spandrels of two additional Caesarea reliefs other than champlevé,<sup>35</sup> and in two tessellated mosaics uncovered in the 6th–7th century AD Bird's Mosaic mansion (Reich 1985: 211, Pl. LIII: 3).<sup>36</sup>

The sixth fragment adorned with lozenge was found incorporated into a simple *opus sectile* floor of a frigidarium in Insula E3S3 (Figure 12: 1a). The rectangular fragment was cut out on three sides from a larger panel, whose estimated dimensions when intact were no less than 100 x 80cm;<sup>37</sup> the panel's right side was broken before the piece was installed into the floor (Figure 12: 1b). When complete it could have been part of the architectural decoration of the first phase of the bath, or of another Caesarea building (Gersht and Gendelman 2019: 62).<sup>38</sup> Although only about quarter of the panel remains, a more or less accurate reconstruction of the overall design can be offered. The corresponding lozenge plaques from Kourion, Amathous, and Hagios Philon (Boyd 1999: Figs. 1–2, 13, 19–20, 23–25; 2007: Pl. 6.14d–e, 6.15, 6.16d, 6.17f, 6.17h) show that the practice was to border the plaque with plain band, usually wider than the inner ones. It is therefore justifiable to offer that the Insula E3S3 panel had plain

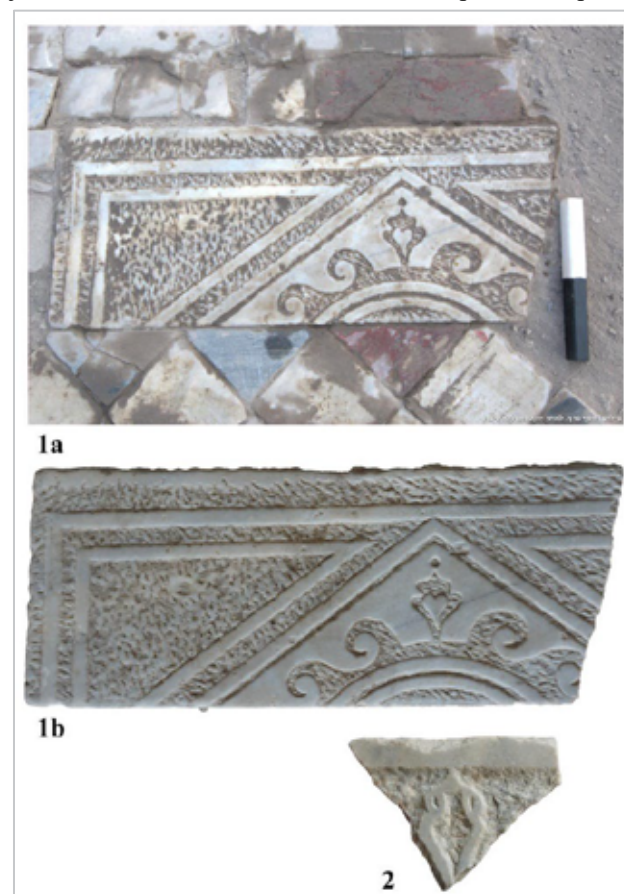


Figure 12. Lozenge rectangular relief (cont.): (1a, b) frigidarium, Insula E3S3; (2) Temple Platform area.

<sup>33</sup> H 17.7cm, W 30.9cm, Th 2.9cm (maximum). Inv. No. CM.AM.3.

<sup>34</sup> 60 x 47cm.

<sup>35</sup> Uncovered by Uzi 'Ad during the 2015 excavation in the Crusader market (unpublished).

<sup>36</sup> For mosaics other than from Caesarea, see e.g., Levi 1971: Pl. CVII,a,e; Magen, Peleg and Sharukh 2012: 357, Fig. 36: 1.

<sup>37</sup> H 26–26.7cm, W 66.5cm, Th 4.2cm

<sup>38</sup> Caesarea is not the only site where champlevé plaques were reused face up in flooring a building. Examples are known from Sarayia chapel located about two kilometers from Kourion (Boyd 2007: 235, Fig. 6.32, Pl. 6.19b) and from the basilica on the acropolis of Amathous (Boyd 1999: 51–52, Fig. 13).



Figure 13. Furniture: (1–2) screen panels, Temple Platform area; (3) sigma tabletop, IAA 1992–1998 excavation, surface find.

border, no less than 2.5 cm wide. Its triangular spandrels were colored but devoid any further ornamentation; likewise, was the medallion within the lozenge filled with

colored material, but as only a small section of it remains it is impossible to know if it was also inhabited. The medallion is encircled by wave pattern, which was



Figure 14. Fragments ornamented with crosses: (1,3) unknown findspot, Sdot-Yam Museum Inv. Nos. CM.AM.11,14; (2) IAA 1992–1998 excavation, surface find.

interrupted by emblems of a lidded amphora ornamented with an ivy leaf—only one preserved—at the acute angles. The pointed amphora recalls the one depicted on another champlévé fragment uncovered in one of the vaults of Augustus and Dea Roma Temple Platform (Figure 12: 2);<sup>39</sup> both are somewhat similar to the ones depicted in the border of a mosaic from Aquileia, Italy (Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 143, Pl. 91: g).

### Furniture

Only three of the champlévé fragments can be classified as furniture. Two of the three fragments came from the excavation within the vaults of Augustus and Dea Roma Temple Platform. One (Figure 13: 1)<sup>40</sup> shows *peltae* arranged in alternately opposed and confronted pairs, forming intermediate spaces in the shape of bifid calyces, which are, likewise, arranged in alternately opposed and confronted pairs. I know of no other champlévé relief of the kind, but the pattern is familiar from Roman mosaics, like those from Italica, Spain (Blanco Freijeiro 1978: 27, Pl. 10: 2), and Daphne, Syria (Levi 1971: Pls. 37: a, 42: a; Kondoleon 2000: 72, Figure 5).

The rounded upper rim of the Caesarea relief suggests that the panel was not intended for wall veneering. The rim seems to be too narrow for a chancel screen but not for ambo—preacher’s pulpit—screen panels of the kind found in the Byzantine Church at Khirbet Beit Sila in Judaea (Batz 2012: 394–397). The thickness of the Caesarea panel is about half of that of the bituminous chalk panels of the hexagonal ambo of Khirbet Beit Sila; but since marble—the stone of which the Caesarea panel is made of—is much firmer than bituminous, a 2.8cm thickness is suffice.<sup>41</sup> During the 1998 excavation conducted by the Combined Caesarea Expedition, six marble fragments of circular ambo base (1.62m in diameter) were found in the octagonal church. The excavators supposed that the base was the floor of a hexagonal ambo, similar to the one from

Khirbet Beit Sila (Stabler and Holum 2008:30, Figure 31). If indeed, the Caesarea panel was one of the ambo’s screen panels, it had to be no less than 80cm high and between 70 and 80cm wide.<sup>42</sup> Like in the panels of Khirbet Beit Sila, the pattern below the rim formed a frieze; the main decoration—possibly an emblem of a cross—occupied the area below the frieze.<sup>43</sup>

The second piece of furniture that the excavation within the vaults of Augustus and Dea Roma Temple Platform yielded, is ornamented on both its sides, and like all other fragments from the same area, probably belonged to the octagonal church or one of its relating buildings (Figure 13: 2a, b).<sup>44</sup> The triangular fragment was cut off a larger panel, undoubtedly a screen. The decoration of the frontal and back faces was akin, consisting of a medallion bordered by a 1.2cm wide plain frame and possibly inhabited by a cross, similar to the champlévé decoration of a chancel plaque from the early Christian Basilica at Thasos (Marcadé 1951: Figure 68).

The third fragment of furniture is of a *sigma* tabletop whose rim—3.5cm wide—is ornamented with acanthus scroll bordered by plain filets (Figure 13: 3).<sup>45</sup> Only a few tabletops with champlévé decoration have been published so far; the most relevant to the study of the Caesarea piece, is the sigma tabletop with inhabited scrolls from the Campanopetra Basilica at Salamis (Roux 1973: 152–158, Figs. 70, 73, Pl. 36a). Besides the resemblance in matters of tabletop-type and basic decoration, the acanthus scroll pattern of the Caesarea fragment is narrower, less elaborate and more condensed, thus leaving no free space to hold animals.

### In Conclusion

Three factors indicate that the Caesarean champlévé reliefs were locally carved:

<sup>39</sup> H 8.4cm, W 11.8cm, Th 1.7cm.

<sup>40</sup> H 17cm, W 12.9cm, Th 2.8cm.

<sup>41</sup> The thickness of the panels—bordered by champlévé vine band—from the Mountain of Aaron, Petra, is 3cm. According to Lehtinen (2008: 218, 220, Fig. 13.1–6) they were part of the ambo of the church.

<sup>42</sup> The Khirbet Beit Sila screen panels measure 55 x 77cm.

<sup>43</sup> Like in the Khirbet Beit Sila screen panels and those of the ambo of basilica A at cape Drepanon (Michaelides 2001: Figs. 5.1a–b, 5.5, 5.7).

<sup>44</sup> H 9.3cm, W 17.5cm, Th 2.2cm.

<sup>45</sup> Surface finds. H 2.88cm, floor thickness 1.49–1.55cm, fragment’s dimensions 19.4 x 10.75cm.



- (a) The multiplicity and variety of motifs of which some have no comparisons among the published champlevé reliefs.
- (b) They have little in common with those found in Cyprus, Syria and Sardis, from where the largest amount of champlevé reliefs came.
- (c) *Spolia* was used for carving some of the plaques.

The repertory of motifs points to two sources of inspiration—mosaics and reliefs—other than champlevé. Conspicuous is the number and diversity of crosses. Apart from the aforementioned examples (Figures 1: 4; 3: 4–6; 4: 4; 6: 3; 8: 1), the corpus includes at least three additional fragments ornamented with crosses (Figure 14). Two preserved only part of one arm, but the accompanying embellishments—the egg and dots (Figure 14: 2) and the ivy leaves (Figure 14: 3) are unusual. Furthermore, many of the four-petaled flowers are shaped like crosses (Figures 7: 1–3). Interesting is the use of rather narrow rectangular plaques to compose a frieze in contrast of the more common long plaques. Worth mentioning is also the fact that most of the Caesarea champlevé reliefs, in contrast to many of the published reliefs from other sites, came from secular semi-public and private contexts and only a few from religious ones. This picture may change with the expansion of the excavations at the site.

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# Byzantine Church at Kafr Kama

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*A tri-apsidal large church, with a large atrium, surrounded by rooms and a well to the north, dated to the 6th-7th century AD, was unearthed about 300 m south of the ancient nuclear center of Kafr Kama. In the center of the village the remains of a building with two apses facing east, a baptistery and reliquary, as well as Greek inscriptions on its mosaic floors, were excavated (Saarisalo 1964). The large distance between the village and the newly excavated church, with no other build evidence in between, but rather few unexcavated tombs in this gap, bring us to suggest that the church and the rooms around it is the remains of a pilgrim monastery outside the town. The area of Eastern Lower Galilee was a 'sacred region' in the Byzantine period with holy pilgrimage centers, from Nazareth and Cana in the west to Mt. Tabor, and the Sea of Galilee to the east (Wilkinson 1977).*

*The Byzantine period remains in Kafr Kama, include not only the two chapels excavated by Saarisalo, which can be connected to a large church (cathedral?) that was not found, but also the remains of private dwellings (including a room with a mosaic floor) excavated by Ben-Nachum (2007). As Roman period remains (2nd-3rd centuries AD) were found in the vicinity of the Byzantine period dwellings area C on Ben Nachum's map. Ben Nachum rightly suggest that the settlement grew during the Byzantine period. All these discoveries with the newly discovered church/monastery, support Bagatti's suggestion to identify Kafr Kama as Helenopolis (Bagatti 1971: 94-95), which was strengthened by Saffrai (1980: 129).*

KEYWORDS: KAFR KAMA; BYZANTINE MONASTERY; BYZANTINE CHURCH; BYZANTINE CHAPEL; MOSAIC FLOOR.

## Introduction

Kafr Kama is situated in the eastern Lower Galilee, near Biq'at Yavne'el, 5Km north of Kfar Tabor (Figure 1). The current village of Kafr Kama founded by Circassian who settled down above ancient ruins and used its stones. Several limited excavations were conducted at Kafr Kama in the past (Figure 2). The most important was carried out by Saarisalo, who uncovered a church dating to the Byzantine period (Saarisalo 1964). Tzori exposed a tomb from the 'Talmudic Period' (Tzori 1969). Rooms and courtyards dated to the Byzantine/Early Umayyad period were also excavated (Ben-Nachum 2007: 106-108).

To the Umayyad period dated a paved road flanked by parallel curbs (Dalali-Amos 2014), Oil-press and storerooms, and a few structures (Syon 2006).

A Byzantine church, with ornate mosaic floors, tombs and installations were revealed in an excavation carried out in July 2020 (Figure 3). The excavation directed by Nurit Feig with Mordechai Aviam, and with assistance from local volunteers. The excavations took place prior to the building of a playground, which initiated by the Kafr Kama Local Council and the Jewish National Fund.

## The Building

The excavation revealed a basilica, oriented west to east comprising an atrium, narthex, nave, and two aisles (Figure 4). There is a dissimilarity in the building as the southern aisle with its apse is shorter than the northern one and the diameter of the southern apse is smaller than the



Figure 1. Map of Kafr Kama Location.

northern one. A Ground Penetrating survey was conducted at the site and discovered a series of rooms and walls between the northern wall of the church and the well. Walls were also identified south of the church, proving that



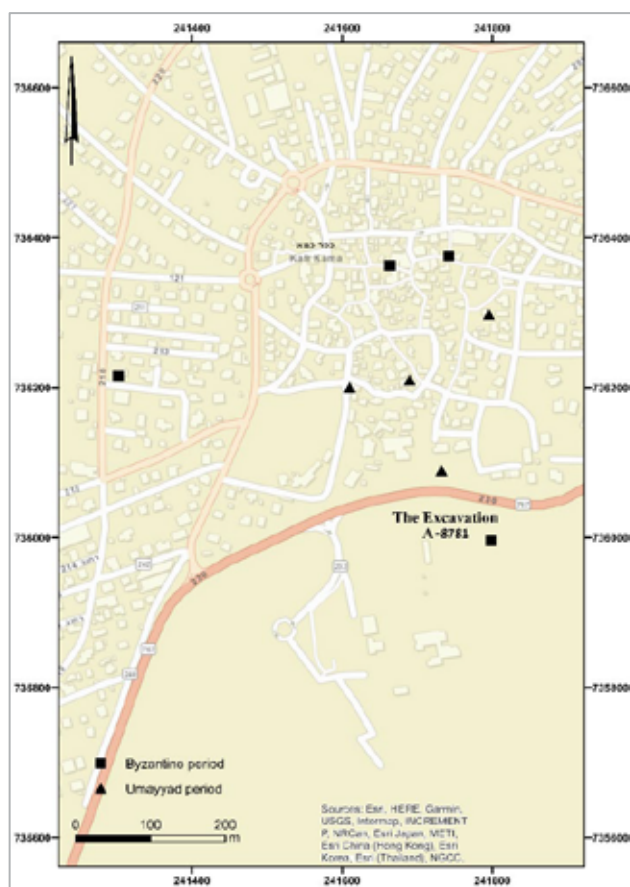


Figure 2. Map of excavations were conducted at Kafr Kama in the past.

the building complex was much larger<sup>1</sup>. The church was constructed directly on the natural soil (*Hizriea* – A natural bed rock of Basalt) typical to northern part of Jezreel Valley. The sanctuary has simple geometric proportions, that the ratio of length to width being 3:1, (measured 36.50 × 12.75m). It consists of large Atrium 20 × 12.30m. However, it was severely damaged and only the south wall (W233) was survived up to one course. The southwest corner and a part of the west wall were poorly preserved.

The white mosaic floor of the narthex measured (12.30 × 3.30m) made of 2 × 2cm tesserae, has been preserved in part. This mosaic floor seems clearly in the south-east, and north-east corners, and where the central entrance to the nave is located. Usually in the eastern wall of the narthex (W232) there were three entrances into the basilica. However, none of them preserved.

The church was tripartite in plan, having a nave (11.30 × 4.80m), not including the external apse, (L237) flanked by two relatively narrow side aisles terminating at their eastern end in external apses. The aisles were separated from the nave by two rows of columns each of which only one stylobate preserved. In the eastern part of the nave was a bema. However, only a rectangular ashlar limestone used in the frame of the bema (L231), preserved. The only remains of the bema's mosaic floor preserved at the edge of the central apse (L221; Figure 5). The southern wall (W203) of the church was built of rather medium size stones in two rows and rubble fill between, preserved up to 35cm, while the other walls in the church preserved only a few cm high. Two architectural phases were identified,

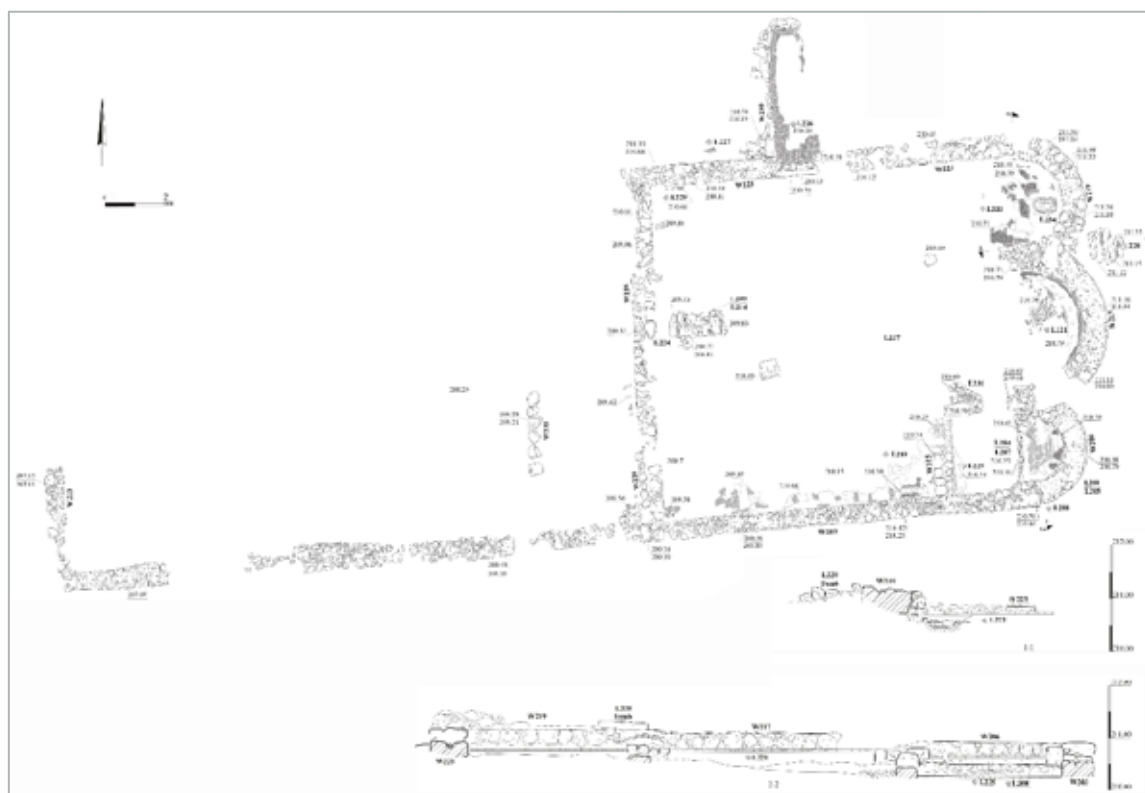


Figure 3. Plan and section of the excavations.

<sup>1</sup> The GPR survey was conducted by Dr Shani Libi.





*Figure 4. Aerial photograph of the church.*



*Figure 5. Remains of the bema's mosaic floor in the central apse. Looking east.*

only in eastern part of the southern aisle: The earlier consists of the two decorated mosaic panels (L225, L218;

Figures 6-7) which probably exist with the apse, which is higher than the aisle, also paved with multi-coloured





Figure 6. Southern aisle. Looking southeast.



Figure 7. Southern aisle decorated mosaic panels.

Looking south.

mosaic floor (L208; Figure 8). The later phase appeared in a shape of a wall segment (W215) laid above the floor

(L218; see Figure 6) as well and related to a white mosaic floor made of larger tesserae (density of the stones is 30 per dm<sup>2</sup>). Traces of white mosaic floor are clearly seemed along the south wall until its end in the west corner with the narthex (Figure 9). The northern aisle was severely damaged, but the apse was founded with a better building technique than the other walls. A small reliquary (60 × 34cm, outer size and 40 × 20cm, inner size, 12cm deep) found, sunk into the floor, surround by a geometric pattern mosaic floor (Figure 10). The reliquary is made of limestone which was inserted into a hole cut to the local basalt soil. No lid was found, it was empty, and no sign of holes to attach a lid. It hints that this reliquary was hidden bellow the floor and was not meant to be taken out.<sup>2</sup> Out of the church, between the central and northern apses a tomb was exposed (1.20 × 1.10m not excavated) covered by five long stones (Figure 11). It is similar in shape to the tomb found in the western part of the church (see below); they are both west-east orientation. There is a possibility that the tombs belong to the church's community, but as they were not excavated, there was no way to date them.<sup>3</sup>

A north hall was found adjacent to the church, probably along the entire length of the north side. From the northern aisle a doorway, preserved with its threshold, opens into a single room (L226; Figure 12). This room, 4.6m length, was partly excavated while, the other two rooms to the east were traced by the ground penetrating radar. The room (L226) paved with well-preserved white mosaic floor where glass window fragments were found above. Remains of colored mosaic floor discovered west of this room indicates another paved unit, probably extended until the edge of the nave border. North of these rooms there are traces of another wall, and a rectangular element (2.00 × 1.10m) which was also diagnosed by the ground penetrating radar. Another element consists of two units measured 2.00 × 0.60m.

<sup>2</sup> This is different from the reliquary in the northern apse at the church found in the village. See Saaristo 1964: 5, Fig. 29.

<sup>3</sup> The tombs are built of cut basalt rocks, but not with ashlar like the Roman period tombs excavated in the village (Ben Nachum 2007: 105-106).





Figure 8. Remains of the southern apse. Looking east.



Figure 9. White mosaic floor along the south wall in the west corner of the narthex.

A round (90cm diameter) opening of a well was found 7m north of the northern rooms and was excavated only 2m deep before we stopped (Figure 13). The well was cut through the *Hizriea* soil, and its walls were lined with small stones down to 1.85m where it became wider. The well was not excavated down to its bottom and no sign of plaster found on its walls. Two small channels found on its opening to the east and to the west.

A small probe was dug below the church floor to trace the foundation close to the supposed main entrance to the nave. A sealed tomb found there (not excavated) appeared to belong to the Roman period prior to the church (Figure 14). The environment of the unexcavated tomb (1.85 × 0.85m) yielded no pottery. However, a similar Roman



Figure 10. The reliquary.

burial tombs was found 40m to the north, together with the tomb in the east, indicates a graveyard.

A few meters west of the church a plaster level (3.00 × 1.60m) surrounded by medium size stones was uncovered, looks like part of an agricultural installation (Figure 15).

#### The Mosaic Floor<sup>4</sup>

As mentioned above. Only few segments of the mosaic floor were preserved: the entire southern apse; The eastern edge of the central apse; Small parts of the northern apse; part of the southern aisle. They all represent geometric and floral designs.

In the southern apse, the margin is of white tesserae simple filet of one black row (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type A1;

<sup>4</sup> We thank Lihi Habas for her help in the detailed description of the mosaic floor.





Figure 11. Aerial photograph of the eastern part of the church.



Figure 12. Threshold between the northern aisle and a room. Looking north.



Figure 13. A round well. Looking west.



Figure 14. The Roman tomb. Looking northeast.

Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 26, Pl. 1a; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Type A1); three rows of white tesserae; simple file of one black row; saw-tooth of red equilateral triangles on the background of identical inverted triangles (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type A5-6; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 38, Pl. 10g;





Figure 15. Agricultural installation. Looking south.

Ovadiah and Ovadia 1987: Type A5-6);<sup>5</sup> and again the simple filets. The semi-circular carpet is made of white tesserae laid in a lattich-patter of scales with a polychrome-rosebuds encoded between the scales (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type J3 without the rosebuds; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 340, Pl. 219c; Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: Type J3 without the rosebuds), the rosebuds made of black chalice and red blossom.<sup>6</sup>

The density of tesserae in the apse is 65 stones per dm<sup>2</sup>.

The mosaic of the central apse, poorly preserved. Margins are wide and decorated with row of spaced serrated polychrome diamonds (black, red and white) and serrated bichrome of lozenges (black and white) (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type E; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: Pl. 5a b; Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: Types D, E); simple filet of black row; two rows of white stones; simple filet of red row; bichrome dotted band (black and white) (Balmelle *et al.* 1985: Pl. 2a); shaded simple guilloche (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type B2; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: Pl. 70h; Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: Type B2) of white, red and black stones; bichrome dotted band (black and white).

The density of tesserae in the central apse is 65 stones per dm<sup>2</sup>.

The circular frame of the northern apse was almost destroyed, but from the small, survived segment, it was identical to the southern apse. Two simple black filets surround the reliquary. In front of the reliquary's frame, the few segments are also like the southern one, including red and white triangles and lattich-patter of scales.

The density of tesserae in the inner frame is 40 stones per dm<sup>2</sup> and in the outer it is 60.

Few segments of mosaic were also left of the southern aisle, it is made of margin adorn with row of spaced and serrated polychrome of diamonds on the white tesserae background (black, light brown and in the center white) (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type E; the diamonds- Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 31m, Pl. 5a; Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: Type D);<sup>7</sup> simple filet of one black row, two white rows, and one black row; polychrome row of trifid calices or lotus flowers, alternately inverted horizontally and shaded (red and white and light brown/gray and white alternately), separated by black undulating line and on black background (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type B9; Balmelle *et al.*

<sup>5</sup> For this design see for example the frame of the medallion in the crypt of St. Elianus at Madaba (Piccirillo 1993: 124–125, Fig. 136).

<sup>6</sup> For this type of design see: The chapel at 'Ein Ha-Shiv'ah (Et-Tabgha) (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 57, Pl. XLV, No. 75), as well as the narthex in the church at Hanita (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 66, Pl.

LXIX:1, No. 89). The same design was used in Room 2 excavated in the village of Kafr Kama by Saarisalo (1964: Pl.21).

<sup>7</sup> For a similar design see: the Burnt Palace of Madaba (Piccirillo 1993: 78, Fig. 50), and the *bema* of the North Church at Esbus (Piccirillo 1993: 250, Fig. 434).



1985:112, Pl 62a, c; Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: Type B9);<sup>8</sup> simple file of one black row, two white rows, and one black row

Carpet: grid of polychrome of diamonds net, made of five serrated filets (black, red, white, red, and black) populated with small diamonds??, and saw-tooth of polychrome equilateral triangles (black, light brown and white tesserae) near the frame (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type H1; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 188, Pl. 124c; Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: Type H1).<sup>9</sup>

The density of tesserae in the decorated floor is 58 stones per dm<sup>2</sup>, while in the upper, white, later floor it is 30.

### Small Finds

Finds derived from the excavation includes pottery vessels, a few glass- vessels and stone artifacts.

### Pottery

The pottery discussed typologically here, was discovered at the church and vicinity as well as around the well.

Bowls (Figure 16: 1-2) belong to the imported fine wares which are a common feature in the Lower Galilee but related only to one of the three main groups of the Red Slip Ware – Late Roman C Ware. Only a few sherds were found in the site: one belongs to Hayes's Form 3C, which is the standard bowl in the Byzantine period (Hayes 1972: 329-383). It has a flaring wall and vertical decorated rim (Figure 16: 1). This form first appeared during the 5th century and continued until the 7th century. The second type of bowl with flaring walls and a heavy knobbed rim (Figure 16: 2) is Form 10A the successor type of LRC3

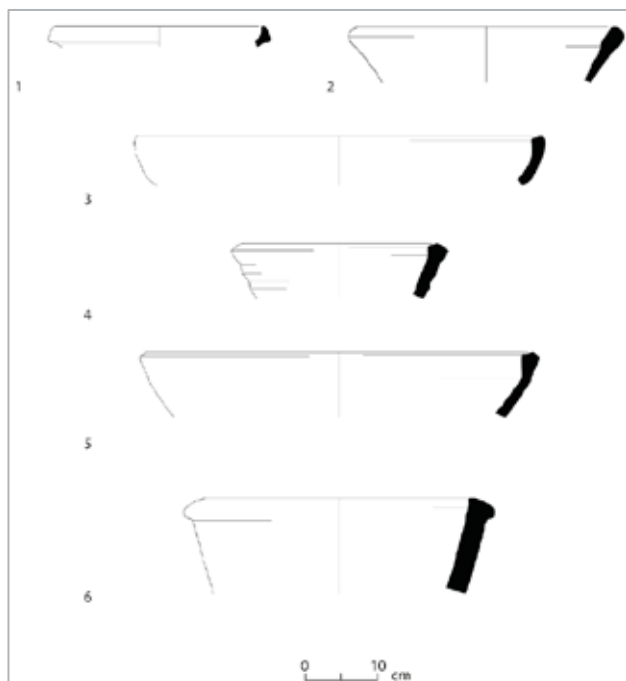


Figure 16. Pottery vessels.

(Hayes 1972: 343-346). Large bowl (Figure 16: 3) has a wide shallow grooving in the rim. Similar bowl found at Caesarea dated to the Byzantine period (Johnson 2008: 132:204).

Kraters made of coarse ware are very common during the end of the Byzantine/Early Islamic period (7th-10th centuries). They derive from the Byzantine tradition with some morphological changes. The coarse ware kraters (Figure 16: 4-6) include three different types:

A: Conical krater (Figure 16: 4) with rectangular rim and straight wall decorated with flat ridges on its upper part. This type first appeared in Pella already in the 4th century until the middle of the 7th century. Same bowls found at Beth She'an, Hammat Gader and Capernaum (Avissar 2014: Fig. 3:8; Ben Arie 1997: Pl. IX:1; Loffreda 1974: 54-60, Fig. 14 :3-14 Class D).

B: Large krater with grooved rim and its wall is ridged below the rim with a single ridge (Figure 16: 5). Similar bowls found at Beth She'an sites, Capernaum and Kursi (Feig, forthcoming: Fig. 2: 2; Johnson 2006: Fig. 15.10: 210, 212; Peleg 1989: 60, Fig. 48: 2; Tzaferis 1983: Fig. 5: 12), as well as Pella (McNicol, Smith and Hennessey 1982: Pl. 148: 2)

C: Straight wall krater (Figure 16: 6), a deep vessel with a triangular rim and thickened walls, usually has a flat base. Most of the parallels are made of gray ware dated to the 7th century found on both sides of the Jordan Valley: Hammat Gader, Pella and Tiberias (Ben Arie 1997: Pl. X: 4; McNicol, Smith and Hennessey 1982: Pl. 149:2; Smith 1973: Pl. 45: 1285; Stacey 2004: Fig. 5.14: 8 Cream-ware).

Two different types were distinguished: casseroles (Figure 17: 1) and close cooking pots (Figure 17: 5). Casseroles (Figure 17: 1) replaced the Roman cooking pot while it appears in 2nd-3rd century contexts at Siqmona (Elgavish 1977: Pls. IV, XXVI: 20). It became popular during the Late Roman and Byzantine periods and continue to be the dominate type until the 8th-9th centuries. The casseroles made of characteristic thin, gritty, red-brown cooking ware with shallow ribbing on the exterior walls. There is a clear continuity in cooking vessels production (ware and shape) from the 6th to the 8th centuries (Watson 1992: 235). Casserole (Figure 17: 1) is rounded in shape typical to the late Byzantine/early Islamic period. This type classified by Magness as casserole Form 1 and dated to a long period of use 4th-9th centuries (Magness 1993: 211-212).

The lids (Figure 17: 2-4) matching casseroles and are made of the same cooking pots ware as the casseroles. Lid (Figure 17: 2) is a carinated in shape, while the other two (Figure 17: 3-4) have a straight wall. These lids are characterized by a beveled rim (Figure 17: 3-4) or flat (Figure 17: 2). Their body may be simply ribbed (Magness 1993: 215).

<sup>8</sup> For a similar design see: The church at Ozem (Habas 2018: 99, Figs. 3, 5) and the church at Kh. Samra (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 98-99, Pl. CII, No. 168).

<sup>9</sup> For similar design see: The Church of the Virgin Mary at Madaba (Piccirillo 1993:64-65, Figs. 2, 21) and the Lower Church of al-Qwayasmah (Piccirillo 1993:266-267, Fig. 487).

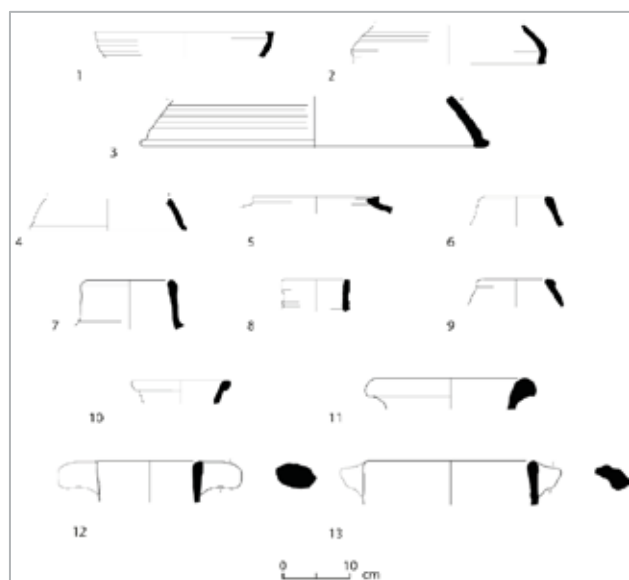


Figure 17. Pottery vessels.

The second type of cooking vessel is the neckless globular cooking pot (Figure 17: 5), made from fine ware. It has an everted rim with a shallow gutter. This type was classified as BS-TPWS.CP7 at Beth She'an and dated by Pella excavators to the 6th-early 7th century (Bar-Nathan 2011: 262, Fig. 11.22: 12; McNicoll, Smith and Hennessey 1982: 152-153, 156-157, Pl. 138: 9, 10; Smith and Day 1989: 109, Pl. 51: 16, 110, Pl. 53: 10). Same date was given at Hammat-Gader (Ben Arie 1997: 371, Fig. XII: 19).

Jars and Amphorae are the dominate vessels in the assemblage:

Bag-shaped storage jars are common throughout the Byzantine and Early-Islamic periods. Jar (Figure 17: 6) made of light brown well levigated clay and has a triangular rim and a single ridge separated the neck from the body, is a very common and long-live form. This jar corresponds to Adan-Bayewitz Type 3 shape but in light brown color, found in Caesarea in the Late Byzantine Building (Adan-Bayewitz 1986: 99-101). Loffreda also date this type to the Byzantine period at Capernaum (Loffreda 2008a: 130; Loffreda 2008b: DG:98, ANF 32). Both jars (Figure 17: 7-8) are red-ware made with a few white inclusions belong to the bag-shaped family, characterized by thickened-inverted rim and the transitional ridge between the neck and the jar body. Usually, they are decorated with white lines applied freely by brush. Same jar discovered in the previous excavation at Kafr Kama (Syon 2006: Fig. 6: 15). Their Comparative material has been found in Kh. Shema, Capernaum and Mesilot (Meyers, Kraabel, and Strange 1976: 227-229; Peleg 1989: Fig. 60: 2-3, 6; St. IV-V, dated to 4th-8th century, Porat 2006: Fig. 6: 5 dated to the Late Byzantine-Early Islamic period). This type of storage jar (Figure 17: 9) made of light brown clay, has a straight neck and rim rounded and a wide pronounced ridge. Parallels found in Jezreel Valley and along the Jordan Valley in: Yoqneam as well as Pella and Tiberias where it was dated to the Early Islamic period (Avisar 1996: 147, Fig. XIII.113: 4, Type 3; McNicoll, Smith and Hennessey 1982: Pl. 141: 2; Oren

1971: 276). At Beth She'an this type appeared in Byzantine period (Johnson 2006: Fig. 15.12: 247). Dark brown jar (Figure 17: 10) has a straight neck and rounded rim dated to the 6th-7th century, found in the East Cemetery at Pella (Smith 1973: Pl. 44: 1254, 1255).

Amphora (Figure 17: 11) made of buff ware, characterized by a flaring thickened rim. It belongs to the large African type dated to the 2nd-4th century. Similar examples were found in the site of the youth hostel at Beth She'an (Avisar 2014: Fig. 9: 6). Amphora (Figure 17: 12) made of green-light brown fabric, classified by Reynolds to Zeguma Form 15C originate in Syrian-Euphrates amphorae with a pale green fabric dated to the 6th-7th century (Reynolds 2005: Pl.21: Fig. 158). Amphora (Figure 17: 13) has two loop handles which joined to the rim and neck. Its origin is Egypt and dated to the 5th century. Similar amphora discovered in the Inner Harbor in Caesarea (Tomber 1999: 320, Fig. 8: 133). At Kh. 'Aqav this type dated to the 5th to 7th century (Calderon 2000: Fig. XX: 25).

Four lamp fragments were founded. Lamp (Figure 18: 1) is made of light brown clay characterized by a thick flat base. Since the upper part is missing it could be decorated in one of three common-pattern of this type: geometric, vegetal, or zoomorphic decoration. At Beth She'an a flat base lamp was ornate with zoomorphic decoration (Hadad 2002: 94, 100:450). Some similar examples are dated to the 7th-mid-8th centuries.

Ornate lamp (Figure 18: 2) made of same fabric as the previous and has a geometric decoration on its shoulder. This type is typical of northern Israel and usually dates to the end of the 6th-first half of the 7th centuries (Calderon 2000: Pl. XXVIII: 108; Rosenthal and Sivan 1978: No. 511). Although lamp (Figure 18: 3) is very fragmentary, traces of its decoration indicate relation to the same type as lamp (Figure 18: 2). The lamp made of reddish-brown clay, has a conical knob handle as seem on complete Islamic lamps at Hammat Gader (Coen Uzzielli 1997: Pl. VIII).

A tongue-shaped handle decorated with a palm frond is the only fragment left from lamp (Figure 18: 4) which was made from light brown clay. This type of handle classified by Hadad as Type 27. Usually, a loop used for carrying the lamp was attached to the body below the decorated part of the handle (2002: 66, 67, Nos. 285-286). This type is common in and around Jerusalem, probably originated there: Ramat Rachel, Tyropoeon Valley, Armenian Garden and A site near Giv'at Shaul (Aharoni 1964: 38-41, Fig. 26: 11-14 'Byzantine complex and Byzantine 'farm-house'; Crowfoot and Fitzgerald 1929: Pl. XVI:33, 35; Tushingham 1985: 90, 97, Fig. 32: 40, 42 'Byzantine IIIB'; Tzaferis 1974: 93, Pl. 16: C 'Byzantine until 636'). Some other handles from Jerusalem are dated by Magness to the mid-6th-late 7th/early 8th centuries (Magness 1993: 251, 254-5; Form 3, variant D). On the basis of the contexts of handles from Beth She'an, Hadad suggests dating to the 5th-6th and perhaps early 7th centuries.

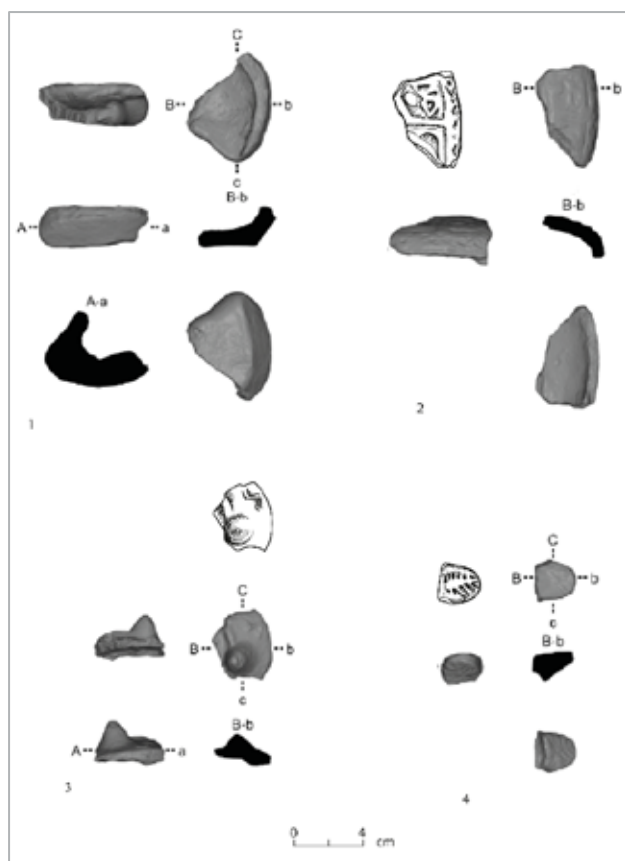


Figure 18. Pottery vessels.

The chronological span of the pottery assemblage at Kafr Kama church is 6th-7th century, corresponds with the finds of Saarisalo and Ben-Nachum excavations at Kafr Kama.

#### Glass<sup>10</sup>

The excavation in the Church at Kafr Kama revealed thirty small glass fragments from which 21 could be identified, most of which are dated to the Byzantine or Late Byzantine period.<sup>11</sup> One fragment was dated to the Late Byzantine and the beginning of the Umayyad period, and several fragments presents modern industrial production (Loc 207, 227).

The vessels assigned to the Byzantine period represent very common types, widely distributed in the eastern Mediterranean. Most of the fragments were too small to be drawn; therefore, they will be mentioned without illustration, except two which will be discussed in detail.

Fragments of the most common wineglasses with slightly flaring rims, rounded by fire with a slight incurve at the edge of the rim (Locs: 204, 214, Figure 19: 1). Such rims were found in the Galilee, in Late Byzantine–Umayyad contexts at Khirbat el-Batiya (Gorin-Rosen 2006: 30\*, Fig. 1: 3–5) and Khirbet el-Shubeika (Gorin-Rosen 2002: 315–316, Fig. 7: 36). Others were found in Jerusalem and in many other regions (see Winter 2019: 34, Type WGrr, with further references therein).

Figure 19: 1, Rim fragment. Light bluish green. Covered with sand deposits. Rim diameter: 8cm. Additional wineglasses with hollow ring bases were found in the church (L204), one with a complete base and beginning of hollow cylindrical foot (L214).

One base fragment represents a special wineglass decorated with mold-blown ribs (L226, Figure 19: 2). Wineglasses with mold-blown patterns are relatively rare comparing with the plain wineglasses or with those decorated with glass trails on and below the rim. Only very few were found in excavations in Israel, one example from Beth She'an is dated to the Late Byzantine-Umayyad period (Katsnelson 2014: 33\*, Fig. 6: 5) with further reference to Beirut. Another example is from Khirbat Burin in the Sharon (Gorin-Rosen 2019: 223, Fig. 1: 6), with further reference to Ashkelon. Wineglasses with mold-blown twisted ribs were found in Jerusalem, some with additional trail decoration on the rim's edge (see Winter 2019: 35, Type WGmbd).

Figure 19: 2, Base fragment. Light bluish glass. Bubbly glass. Mold-blown ribbed pattern on the base. Uneven base and irregular ribs. Carless manufacture. Base diameter: 3.5cm.

A few fragments belong to oil lamps: oil lamps with an outfolded rim, oil lamp with conical hollow stem with a pointed end (L226). Additional fragments present bottles: two with upright infolded rims (L207, 226), a bottle decorated with wound horizontal trails around the neck (L227), a bottle with

concave base (L204), and two bottles with flat bases (L226). One fragment of a jug handle made of greenish glass with dark veins (L220) was also identified.

A bottle decorated with a thick wavy trail around the neck, of which only fragment of the neck survived, dates to the Late Byzantine or the beginning of the Umayyad period (L207). This type of decoration was very popular, see the examples from Beth She'an dated to the Late Byzantine-Umayyad period (Katsnelson 2014: 37\*–38\*, Fig. 7: 7, 8) with further reference therein.

Some of these glass finds might have been used in the church, like the oil lamps and the wineglasses, and were probably originated in a local glass workshop. However, the small quantities and their poor state of preservation limited further reconstructions.

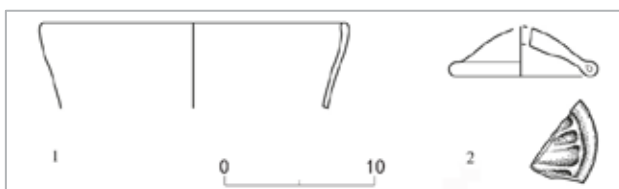


Figure 19. Glass vessels.

<sup>10</sup> The glass was studied by Yael Gorin-Rosen

<sup>11</sup> The glass was drawn by Hagit Tahan-Rosen.



## Discussion and Conclusions

A tri-apsidal large church, with a large atrium, surrounded by rooms and a well to the north, dated to the 6th-7th century, was unearthed about 300m south of the ancient nuclear center of Kafr Kama. Byzantine period remains were excavated during the years in the village. The main excavation was made by Saarisalo (1964) in the center of the modern village, in which the remains of a building with two apses facing east, a baptistery and reliquary, as well as Greek inscriptions on its mosaic floors, were excavated. It is possible that these chapels were connected to a large church (cathedral?) that was not found. In another excavation done by Ben-Nachum (2007) the remains of private dwellings (including a room with a mosaic floor) were unearthed. Roman period (2nd-3rd centuries AD) tombs were found in the vicinity of the Byzantine period dwellings of area C on Ben Nachum's. Ben Nachum rightly suggest that the settlement grew during the Byzantine period. The large distance between the ancient village and the newly excavated church, with no other build evidence in between, but rather few unexcavated tombs in this gap, bring us to suggest that the recently excavated church and the rooms around it are the remains of a pilgrim monastery outside the town.<sup>12</sup> The area of Eastern Lower Galilee was a 'sacred region' in the Byzantine period with holy pilgrimage centers, from Nazareth and Cana in the west to Mt. Tabor, and the Sea of Galilee to the east (Wilkinson 1977).

All these discoveries with the newly discovered church/monastery, support Bagatti's suggestion to identify Kafr Kama as Helenopolis (Bagatti 1971: 94-95), which was later strengthened by Safrai (1980: 129).

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<sup>12</sup> On Galilean monasteries and especially pilgrim monasteries, see Aviam and Ashkenazi 2014. The extraordinary size of the atrium can also hint for the identification of the complex as a pilgrim monastery. A

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# Mosaic Floors of the Monastery in Sede Nahum

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*The monastery in Sede Nahum is dated between 4th to 6th centuries AD. Several stages of extensions and reconstructions can be discerned. Some rooms are paved with polychrome mosaic floors, part of the repertoire of common patterns throughout the Holy Land in the Byzantine period. In the courtyard is a medallion with Solomon's knot. A frame of undulating ivy branches decorates room 8. In the chapel are vine scrolls populated with animals, birds, aquatic birds, a mongoose fighting a snake, and a grape-picker, surrounded by geometric and vegetal frames. Both the chapel's liturgical space and room 2 are decorated with geometric networks. In the hall is a laurel wreath, with fruits among the leaves, and a Solomon's knot within, surrounded by a geometric frame. Crosses appear in some of the rooms. Some of the mosaics have decorative meaning, and some also have Christian symbolic meaning. In the Muslim period (7th–9th centuries AD) the monastery was abandoned.*

KEYWORDS: SEDE NAHUM; MONASTERY; POPULATED VINE SCROLLS; SOLOMON'S KNOT; CROSSES.

## Introduction

The Sede Nahum site was excavated by N. Tzori on behalf of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums in 1955–1957. Tzori uncovered the remains of a monastery with basalt stone walls and a plastered pool.<sup>1</sup> He discerned four strata: Stratum IIb dates to the 4th century AD, when the old chapel was built. Stratum IIIa dates to the 4th – 5th century AD with building extensions: an open courtyard and a southern residential quarter. Stratum II dates to the 6th century AD, with a new chapel, living quarters, halls and rooms, enclosed within a wall. In all these strata, some rooms had mosaic floors, while some were paved with marble or ceramic slab. Stoves and tombs were also discovered, and the complex was surrounded by a wall. Stratum I date to the 7th – 9th centuries AD, when the monastery was abandoned, and the site was inhabited by nomads (Dalali-Amos 2014).<sup>2</sup> In 2011 a new salvage excavation was conducted at the site by E. Dalali-Amos on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority (Dalali-Amos 2014).<sup>3</sup> This article will focus on the mosaic floors that adorned the monastery complex during its various stages.<sup>4</sup>

## Stratum IIb (Room 8)

Room 8 (Figures 1, 2): Belongs to Stratum IIb and is located to the south of the ancient chapel. The room was cut by the south wall of the later chapel, and relates to an ancient room arrangement, whose walls are in a different direction than the later complex, which inclines slightly to the south. From this room, there are remnants of a mosaic floor.<sup>5</sup>

The carpet is surrounded by a frame of undulating ivy branches, with alternately inverted bunch of grapes (Avi-Yonah 1933: Types BI, J6; variant with ivy leaves - Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 114, Pl. 64d; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Types BI, J6); simple file of single dark row (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type A1; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 26, Pl. 1a; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Type A1); three rows of white tesserae; simple file of single dark row. The carpet is decorated with a geometric pattern of intersecting octagons forming squares and hexagons, and lozenges adorn the hexagons (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type H3; variant - Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 260, Pl. 169b; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Type H3).<sup>6</sup>

## Stratum IIIa (courtyard)

In Stratum IIIa, a courtyard was built west of the ancient monastery. The courtyard was paved with coarse white mosaic, decorated in the center with a medallion consisting of several frames (Figure 3): saw-tooth of red equilateral triangles on a background of identical inverted white triangles (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type A5-6; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 38, Pl. 10g; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Type A5-6); simple file of single dark row; three rows of white tesserae; and simple file of single dark row. Within the medallion is an interlaced star of two squares (Balmelle *et al.* 2002: 41); circle; and double band Solomon's knot in the center (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type I4; Balmelle *et al.* 2002: 42; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Type I4). All the components of the composition are designed in simple stripes. Later the new chapel's southwestern corner was built, covering part of the medallion.<sup>7</sup> In addition, one of

<sup>1</sup> Permit Nos. 25/1955 and 19/1956.

<sup>2</sup> Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 125–126, No. 212; Tzori, Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) archive file. The site is briefly mentioned in Tzori 1957: 261; 1962: 183–184, Pl. 25:3–6; 1977: 84. My grateful thanks to Galeb Abu Diab, Ayelet Dayan, Edna Dalali-Amos and Walid Atrash of Israel Antiquities Authority for their help and cooperation.

<sup>3</sup> Permit No. A-6110.

<sup>4</sup> Black and white photographs were taken from the archive file of Israel Antiquities Authority, color photographs Israel Antiquities Authority and Lihi Habas, picture processing Noa Habas.

<sup>5</sup> Room 8 is mentioned only in Bulletin 1957: 7, No. 48; Dalali-Amos 2014. The floor was left *in situ*, therefore a technical-stylistic discussion cannot be held.

<sup>6</sup> Definitions of the patterns from: Avi-Yonah 1933; Balmelle *et al.* 1985; Balmelle *et al.* 2002; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987.

<sup>7</sup> The floor was left *in situ*, therefore a technical-stylistic discussion cannot be held. However, Tzori noted that the density of the stones is 20–25 per dm<sup>2</sup>.

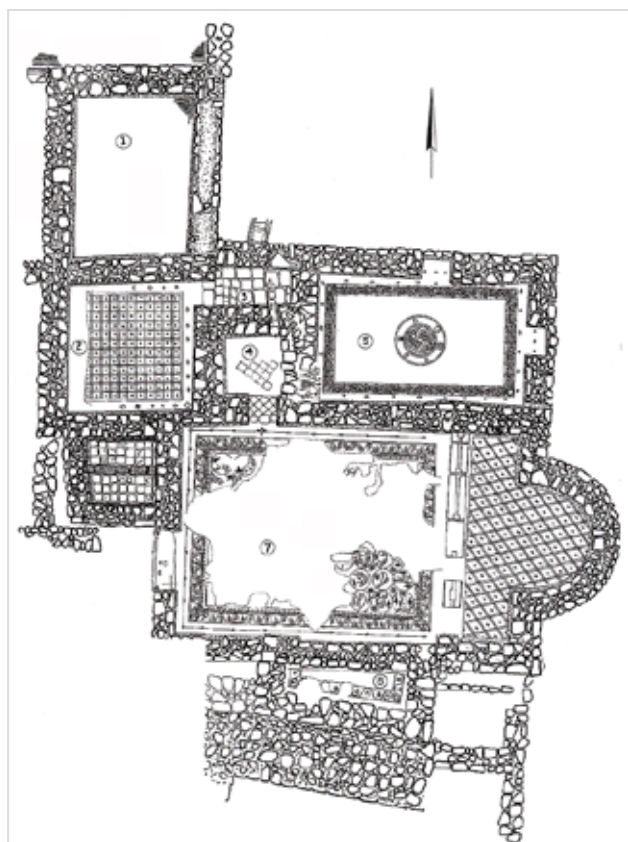


Figure 1. Plan of Sede Nahum monastery.

the rooms in this stratum is adorned by a mosaic floor with a cross in the east, and Tzori assumed that this room was used as a prayer hall.



Figure 2. Mosaic floor of the room 8, Looking south.

## Stratum II

To this Stratum belong the new chapel (7), hall (5), rooms (4, 2, 1), and the cell (3) (Figures 1, 4). The chapel (room 7, Figures 1.7, 4-6):<sup>8</sup> built over the old chapel, and oriented along a west-east axis. It is rectangular in structure 6m wide, and c. 11m in length, with an external apse to the east 3m in diameter. Two entrances were found: one in the western wall, with a basalt stone threshold 1.65m long and



Figure 3. Medallion in mosaic floor of the courtyard.

65-75cm wide, in which there are niches and grooves for the bolts. The second is in the north wall shared with Room 4 and is 68cm wide.

A chancel screen separates the hall from the liturgical space. The chancel screen (Figures 1.7, 4) is 5.9m long, set on a foundation of seven limestone stones, one of which is in secondary use with a Greek inscription. The stones have square sockets for the chancel screen posts, and long, narrow grooves for the screen panels. From the remains of the grooves in the floor, an entrance can be reconstructed in the center and on the axis of the chapel, two posts to the sides of the entrance, two posts next to the north and south walls, and between them another pair of posts, into which four chancel screen panels were inserted. The posts and screen panels have not been preserved.

The hall's mosaic floor consists of white margins decorated by serrated polychrome lozenges joined by a single black line, a circle with four buds facing four directions, and serrated polychrome diamonds at the corners. A bluish-gray outline forms the geometric patterns, with a row of yellow stones, a pink row, and white stones in the center; simple file of a single bluish-gray row; two rows of white tesserae; simple file of one bluish-gray row; wide frame of undulating ivy branches with alternately inverted leaves and two leaves at the corners (Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 114, Pl. 64d).

The ivy branches and leaves are formed by a row of bluish-gray stones. The color of the leaves varies, sometimes filled uniformly in pink, yellow, gray, and reddish stones, and sometimes with a combination of dark gray with light gray in the center; a simple file of single bluish-gray row; two rows of white tesserae; bichrome wave pattern of alternating bluish-gray and white (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type B7-8; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: Pl. 101b; Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: Type B7-8); simple filets of single bluish-

<sup>8</sup> The northwestern part of the mosaic is on display in the kibbutz Sede Nahum, and the southeastern part is displayed in Beit Shturman

Museum in Ein Harod. My grateful thanks to Shmuel Armon and Ofra Baran for their help and cooperation.





Figure 4. The new chapel (7), hall (5), cell (3) and room (4). Looking southwest.



Figure 5. The mosaic floor of the chapel: the northwestern part.

gray row, two white, bluish-gray and white rows, and single bluish-gray row.



Figure 6. The mosaic floor of the chapel: the southeastern part.

The carpet is decorated with populated vine scrolls, partially preserved. It originally had ten rows, and seven scrolls in each row, viewed looking east from the west entrance.

In the first row only, a running stag is preserved on the left, and a quail in the space between the first and second scrolls, which have partially survived (Figure 7 left). In the second row only fragments of rabbit eating grapes preserved on the left, and a pigeon in the space between





Figure 7. The mosaic floor of the chapel: Stag and a quail (left), rabbit eating grapes and a pigeon (right).



Figure 8. The mosaic floor of the chapel: Hind legs of an animal with hooves.

the first and second scrolls (Figure 7 right). In the third row, fragments of the scroll and the hind legs of a hoofed animal remain (Figure 8). The fourth, fifth and sixth rows are completely destroyed. Preserved in the seventh row are

a duck, part of a donkey with a saddle<sup>9</sup>, and a long-beaked bird on the right. In the eighth row five scrolls have survived, and within them, a red-crested rooster, part of an animal with a curved body, a hind, duck or heron, and a mongoose fighting a snake (Figure 9 left). In the ninth row two doves (Figure 9 right), and two ducks (Figure 10) remain. In the tenth row the convex back of an animal, animal hooves, a barefoot grape-picker wearing a short tunic decorated with a green margin (Figure 11), and a fox (Figure 12) remain.

The vine scrolls are shaped by a row of brown stones and two red rows, forming circular medallions. Out of these grow brown tendrils, serrated bluish-gray vine leaves with a reddish-pink center, and grape clusters designed as circles with an incorporated outline, brown on one side and bluish-gray on the other, or bluish-gray alone with a circular red row inside, and a white stone in the center. The clusters fill the scrolls and the spaces between them.

The head and horns of the stag are shaped by a bluish-gray outline, the eye is formed by a semi-circular bluish-gray outer row, a white inner row, and a bluish-gray round stone for the pupil. The face is brown, yellow, gray and beige. The mouth is open, with a protruding red tongue. The ears are brown, and bluish-gray and gray inside. A dark yellow contour shapes the outline of the body and the back of the legs. The upper part is yellow, and the abdomen is white-beige and gray. The front of the legs and the hooves are bluish-gray in color. A bluish-gray contour shapes the

<sup>9</sup> Tzori also mentions a donkey owner, but nothing is left today.





Figure 9. The mosaic floor of the chapel: Mongoose fights a snake (left), two doves (right).



Figure 10. The mosaic floor of the chapel: Ducks.

front section, the eye and the pupil of the quail. The wing, tail and legs are red. Elongated stripes in pink and gray fill the wing and neck, and the lower parts of the body are yellow. The body is formed by short, diagonal white and bluish-gray stripes. A bluish-gray outline shapes the rabbit's head, ears and leg. The face is rows of yellow and beige, and the ears are gray and white rows. Yellow and violet rows form the back, and the body is in shades of orange, yellow and beige. White and gray stones are used for the legs. The body of the pigeon is bluish-gray, the beak and legs are red. The eye is formed of small white stones, and the pupil is bluish-gray. The wing is shaped by a red and an orange line, and the body by gray and white rows. A bluish-gray contour outlines the hind legs and the hooves, and the body is gray. The back and tail of the mongoose are shaped by diagonal rows in alternating yellow, bluish-gray, and red. Its body is rows of gray and beige stones, its belly is white, with short, diagonal stripes

in light brown and white. The head is outlined by a bluish-gray line, and the face is gray and white. A green and red stripe connects the head to the body. A brown outline shapes the legs. The snake is designed in a row of bluish-gray stones and a row of alternating bluish-gray and orange stones. A black line forms the body and tail and fills the neck of two doves. The beak and legs are red, the head is gray, the eyelid is a black line, and the pupil is a round, black stone on a white background. The wing and body are in shades of gray, yellow and white-beige. The ducks are designed in a bluish-gray contour that also shapes the details of the wing and tail. The beak is outlined in dark red, and the beak and legs are red. The body is rows of gray, light brown, white and beige, and one of the ducks has a row of alternating gray and black stones. The harvester holds a bunch of grapes in one hand, and in the other a vessel for the harvested grapes, of which only the





Figure 11. The mosaic floor of the chapel: Barefoot grape-picker.



Figure 12. The mosaic floor of the chapel: A fox.

bluish-gray, its back and tail are brown and red lines, and the body is light brown and white. A black stripe forms the eyelid, and the pupil is a round black stone on a white

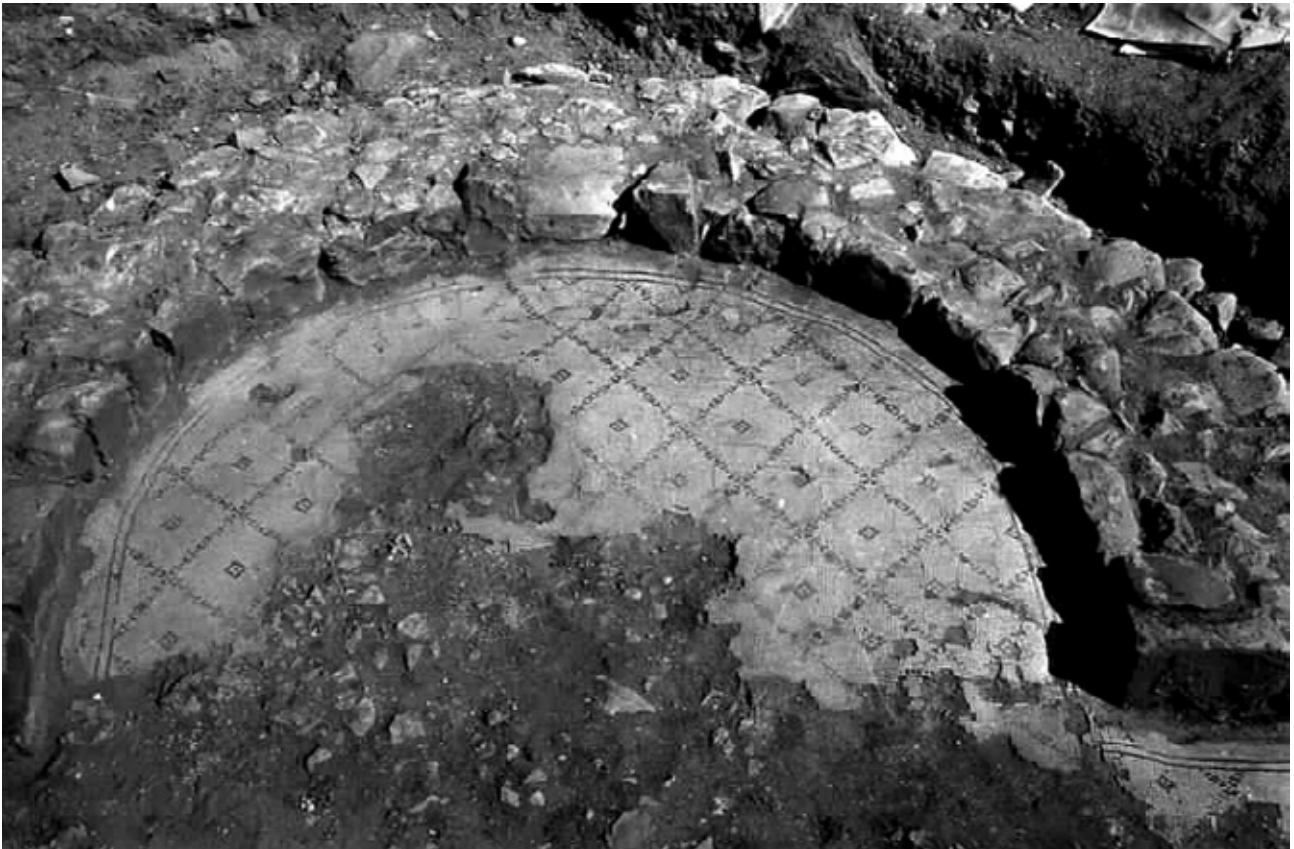


Figure 13. The mosaic floor of the liturgical space, Looking east.

handle remains. A brown contour outlines his face, nose, mouth and feet.

The body is depicted in reddish and light brown colors. A black outline shapes the short, jagged robe, tied at the waist and decorated with green, light brown and white stripes following the outline. The crouching fox is outlined in

background. The mouth is open, with a red tongue. Red stones appear in the legs and at the tip of the nose.<sup>10</sup>

The liturgical space (Figures 1:7, 4, 13):<sup>11</sup> a uniform carpet adorns the *bema* and the apse, surrounded by simple single dark file; two rows of white tesserae; and simple single dark file. The carpet is decorated with a polychrome

<sup>10</sup> The other scrolls are not accessible, and a technical-stylistic discussion is not possible.

<sup>11</sup> The floor was left *in situ*, therefore a technical-stylistic discussion is not possible.





Figure 14. Margins, frames and carpet of the mosaic floor of room 5.

diamond network populated with serrated diamonds. The diamond network is made of rows of adjoined rosebuds with small, black, serrated, polychrome diamonds inside. The rosebuds have black chalice, red blossom, and one white stone between them (variation Avi-Yonah 1933: Type H7; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 44, Pl. 15f, j; Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: Type H7).

Four tombs were found below the mosaic floor, three near the northern wall in the main hall, and one in the apse.

### Technical Analysis

For the most part the tesserae are square and of uniform size, apart from the larger stones in the margins, and small stones in the eyes. Round stones were used for the pupils, and triangular stones for the tip of the leaves, and beaks of the birds.

The tesserae are white, beige, bluish-gray, red, pink, brown, orange, dark and light yellow, violet limestone, and green glass. The density of the stones is 85.5 per dm<sup>2</sup> (margins), 90 per dm<sup>2</sup> (undulating ivy branch frame), 144



Figure 15. Laurel wreath in the center of the mosaic floor of room 5.

per dm<sup>2</sup> (wave pattern frame), and 120 per dm<sup>2</sup> (populated vine scrolls carpet).

**Room 5** (Figures 1.5, 4)<sup>12</sup> is located to the north of the chapel, 6m long, and 3.7m wide on the western side, 3.65m on the eastern side. Two niches were discovered, one in the northern wall, measuring 49 x 96cm, and the other in the eastern wall measuring 49 x 88cm. Tzori identified the room as a baptistery, although no baptismal basin was discovered, and it is possible that his suggestion was informed by the two niches, since niches and shelves were indeed found in some baptisteries, for the robes of the baptized. But similar niches are also found in the side rooms of churches. Additionally, no opening was found between this room and the neighboring chapel, as was necessary for the baptized to enter the church / chapel in a ceremonial procession after their baptism (Ben-Pechat 1989: 166, 170, 178–179, 182; 1990: 508–510; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses*, I – III, Cross ed. 1951: 53–67). Thus, the role of the room is still unclear. The entrance is in the western wall and has a basalt stone threshold, 1.65m long and 65-75cm wide with niches and grooves for the bolts, facing Room 4, with which it shares a common wall.



Figure 16. Threshold of room 5.

The margins and the floor of the niches (Figure 14) are adorned with a row of spaced and serrated polychrome lozenges and diamonds, outlined in brown and filled with gray, light brown, and white stones, and brown in the center (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type E; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 31, lozenges and diamonds – 31, Pl. 5b; Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: Types D, E). The frames (see Figure 14) from the outside inward are: simple file of single brown row; three

<sup>12</sup> The floor is on display in Sede Nahum.

rows of white tesserae; simple file of single black row; wide frame of row of tangent-poised, shaded squares interlaced with circles. The poised squares made of black, yellow, white and black rows. The circles comprise two bands: one of black, red, reddish, white and black rows, the other of black, gray and black rows. At the intersections between the squares and circles are four white stones, with a kind of red blossom of rosebuds and white stone at the bases. At the corners of the frame are two squares surrounded by a semicircle. A short row of brown/dark red stones connect the circles and the squares outside and appear in the corners of the frame (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type B15; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 129, Pl. 79b; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Type B15). Next is a simple file of single black row; saw-tooth of monochrome black equilateral triangles on a white background of identical inverted triangles. A short row of black stones marks the corners (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type A5-6; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 38, Pl. 10g; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Type A5-6).

The carpet (Figures 14, 15) is decorated with white tesserae laid in a lattice-pattern of scales, with polychrome rosebuds enclosed between the scales (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type J3 and Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Type J3 without the rosebuds; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 340, Pl. 219c), which have a black chalice, red blossom, and white stone at the base of the blossom. In the center of the carpet is a laurel wreath (Figure 15). The laurel leaves emerge from a square of red and white concentric rows, with black in the center, maybe in imitation of a precious stone. The leaves are designed in alternating black and white, and red and white, on a dark background. At the sides among the leaves are fruits: peaches/apples in red and white, citrons with a light brown contour and white inside, and a red pomegranate at the top of the wreath, towards which the laurel leaves turn. Small, dark, serrated leaves are depicted on both sides of the wreath. Within the wreath is a Solomon's knot (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type I4; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Type I4; Balmelle *et al.* 2002: 42), one band made of a rainbow pattern in gray, red, orange, white, dark gray and black rows of stones laid diagonally, and the other a simple guilloche of shaded bands, one in black, orange, beige and white colors, and the other in black, dark red, reddish and white colors, with white stones in the middle of the loops (Balmelle *et al.* 2002: 120, Pl. 70h). Quarter-circles with buds within connect the outer face of the Solomon's knot, there are small semicircles at the intersections, and a small rectangle in the center of the interlace. In the floor niche in the northern wall there is a cross (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1978: 126).

The threshold belongs to the early stage, and is decorated with an amphora with flowers, and some more flowers at each side. The lower part has not been preserved, since it was destroyed by a later wall (Figure 16). A dark outline forms the body and parts of the polygonal amphora. The shoulder of the amphora is wavy, it has a long neck, and the rim is depicted in a 3/4 view revealing its contents,

from which branches grow. Two curled handles in the form of volutes extend from the rim of the vessel to the shoulder. The flowers are formed of branches that end in open and closed red and pink flowers.<sup>13</sup>

### Technical Analysis

For the most part the tesserae are square and of uniform size, apart from triangular stones for the tip of the leaves. The tesserae are made of white, beige, dark and light gray, red, pink, dark and light brown, orange, yellow, and black limestone. The density of the stones is 72 per dm<sup>2</sup> (margins), 64–72 per dm<sup>2</sup> (frames), 64–81 per dm<sup>2</sup> (scales and rosebuds of the carpet), and 81–100 per dm<sup>2</sup> (laurel wreath).

**Room 4** (Figures 1.4, 4) is located north of the chapel between Room 5 and Room 2, and is square, 1.7 x 1.7m. An opening with an 85cm long threshold in the southern wall connects between the chapel and the room. The



Figure 17. The mosaic floor of room 2, Looking south.

<sup>13</sup> Only the ends of the flowers have been preserved, so the technical-stylistic analysis is limited.



threshold is paved with gray limestone, and the floor is paved with marble panels in reddish, gray and white colors, arranged diagonally. The slabs are square and measure 18 x 18cm.

**Room 2** (Figures 1.2, 4, 17) is located northwest of the chapel, measuring 3.6 x 3.65m, and borders Room 1.<sup>14</sup>

The margin is adorned with a row of spaced and serrated polychrome diamonds (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type E; Balmelle *et al.* 1985: 31, Pl. 5a; Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: Type D), and in the center of the south side is a small 'x' shaped cross. Simple frames surround the carpet: simple file of single black row; two rows of white tesserae; and simple file of single black row. The carpet is a geometric grid of orthogonal squares made of two black rows and a white row in the middle, enclosing small, serrated polychrome squares (Avi-Yonah 1933: Type A8; Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: Type A8).

An opening on the northeastern side, leading from Room 2 to Cell 3 (Figures 1.3, 4), is 2.5m long and 1.01-1.12m wide, and was paved with ceramic slabs. Tzori identified this unit as a lavatory, since he found a sewage channel there installed in the southern wall separating Cell 3 from Room 4.

### Analysis of Geometric and Vegetal Compositions

The compositions that form the frames, carpets, and motifs of the monastery at Sede Nahum are part of the common repertoire of mosaic floor patterns of the Holy Land.

*Margins:* Two type of margins are found. A simple of row of polychrome serrated lozenges and diamonds is extremely common, such as in the monastery of Lady Mary and the Imhoff monastery in Beth She'an, the church at Kafr el-Makr, and Haditha (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 26, 32, 57, 62, Pls. XXI, XXVII.1, XLVI, LXII, Nos. 26, 28, 76, 86). The other pattern is more complex, made of serrated polychrome lozenges joined by a single line, and a circle and four buds facing four directions. Only one variant is found in the Theotokos Chapel at Mt. Nebo, as serrated squares joined by a single line (Piccirillo 1993: 151, Fig. 200).

*Frames:* A simple frame is very frequently used, alone or together with additional frames – all are well known.

*Bichrome serrated saw-tooth pattern* – appears in the monastery of Lady Mary in Beth She'an, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the basilica of the Shepherds' Field (Beth Sahur) (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 21–23, 25, 29, Pls. XVIII, XX:2, XXIV, Nos. 19, 25–26), and the cave-church of the monastery at Khirbet ed-Deir (Hirschfeld 1993: Figs. on pp. 246, 248; Talgam 1999: 111, Figs. 2, 11).

This pattern also appears as the frame of a medallion, as in the Gaza Maiumas Synagogue, the church at Shavei Zion, and the monastery at Tell Basul in the Beth She'an Valley (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 61, 127, 137–138, Pls. LX, CXLVI, CLXXIII, Nos. 83, 215, 235), and in the crypt of St. Elianus at Madaba, and the Lower Church at Massuh (Piccirillo 1993: 124–125, 254, Figs. 136, 446–447).

*Bichrome wave pattern* – decorates the basilica at 'Ein Hanniya (Baramki 1934: 115, Pl. XXXVI), the church at Horvat Berachot (Tsafir and Hirschfeld 1979: 306, Figs. F, 15–17; 1993: Figs. on pp. 210–211), the Monastery of St. Martyrius at Ma'ale Adummim (Magen 2015: 72, Figs. 84, 86), and the cave-church of the monastery at Khirbet ed-Deir (Hirschfeld 1993: Figs. on pp. 248–249, Pl. XVII:B; Talgam 1999: 107, 111, Figs. 2, 13, Pls. II:2, III:2).

*Undulating ivy branches* – appear in the church at Askalon-Barne'a (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 13–14, Pl. III:1, No. 7), the Samaritan Synagogue and a villa in Beth She'an (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 34, 40, Pls. XXIX:2, XXXV, Nos. 30, 42), and the south chapel at Kafr Kama, with lotus flowers (Saarisalo and Palva 1964: 7, Pls. 7–8). The combination of undulating ivy branches with bunches of grapes as appears in Sede Nahum is unique and has no parallels.

*Tangent-poised shaded squares interlaced with circles* – less common but found in the church at Shavei Zion (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 127, Pl. CXLV, No. 215), and the church at Khaldé, Lebanon (Chéhab 1958: 113; 1959: Pls. LXXV–LXXVI). A variant decorates the villa at Beth She'an (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 40, Pl. XXXIV:2, No. 42).

*Carpet of white tesserae laid in a lattice-pattern of scales with polychrome rosebuds enclosed between the scales* – found in the chapel at 'Ein Ha-Shiv'ah (Et-Tabgha), the church at Hanita, the church at Khirbet Samra, the monastery at Migdal, and the church at Shiqmona (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: 57, 66, 98–99, 110–111, 132, Pls. XLV, LXIX:1, CII:1, CXXIV:2, CLVII, Nos. 75, 89, 168, 186, 221).

*Carpet of diamond network made of rosebuds* – this pattern is very common, populated with a wide variety of motifs (fruits, vegetables, flowers, animals, birds, and geometric): it appears in the Monastery of St. Martyrius at Ma'ale Adummim (Magen 2015: 55, Figs. 56, 58, 61), the cave-church of the monastery at Khirbet ed-Deir (Hirschfeld 1993: Figs. on pp. 248–249; Talgam 1999: 107, Figs. 1–2), the Monastery of Lady Mary in Beth She'an (Fitzgerald 1939: 8–10, Pls. XIII, XVIII), Shavei Zion (Prausnitz 1967: Plan 7, Pls. XXVIII–XXIX, XL:b), Kafr Kama (Saarisalo and Palva 1964: Figs. 5, 16), and Kursi (Tzaferis 1983: Pl. XI:6).

<sup>14</sup> The floor was left *in situ*, therefore a technical-stylistic discussion is not possible.



*Carpet of orthogonal squares and enclosed small serrated polychrome squares* – this pattern is less common, variants appear in the church at ‘Evron (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 59–60, Pl. L:1, No. 80), the lower pavement of the tomb chamber at el Hammām, Beth She’an (Avi-Yonah 1936: 27–28, Pls. XIII:2, XVII:11), and the Church of Bishop Johannes at Ḥorbat Barqa (Gan Yavne; Habas 2016: 106\*, Fig. 39).

*Carpet of intersecting octagons, each forming a central square and four surrounding oblong hexagons* – is very common, found in the church at Bahan (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 14–15, Pl. VII, No. 8), the chapel at Mevo Modi’im (Magen and Kagan 2012: 232–233, Fig. 105:3, No. 105), church A at Magen (Tzaferis 1993: Fig. on p. 284), and the lower pavement of the tomb chamber at el Hammām, Beth She’an (Avi-Yonah 1936: 27–28, Pls. XIII:2, XVII:9).

*Interlaced star of two squares* – appears in Jordan in the church at Jubaiha, or as part of nets in the church at Shunah al-Janubiyah, and in the church of the Virgin Mary (Piccirillo 1993: 64–65, 314, 322, Figs. 2, 23, 643, 663–664, 668).

*Solomon’s knot* – appears in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, Haditha (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 21–23, 62–63, Pls. XVIII, LXII, Nos. 19, 86), and in the church at Zahrani in Lebanon (Chéhab 1958: 93, Fig. 6; 1959: Plan 7, Pl. XLVII: 2).

*Medallion and laurel wreath* – these usually contain inscriptions, such as in the Cathedral Church at Madaba, the New Baptistery Chapel at Mt. Nebo, the Church of Bishop Sergius at Umm al-Rasas (Piccirillo 1993: 116, 150, 234–235, Figs. 105, 197, 331, 365), and in Shiqmona (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 131–132, Pl. CLVI:2, No. 220). They also contain a variety of meaningful motifs, such as sandals (Habas 2009; 2014); a ram near or tied to a tree in the chapel of the Twal Family in Madaba and the Lower Church at Massuh (Piccirillo 1993: 128, 254, Figs. 138, 140, 446–447); a cross in the chapel at Beth Ha-Shitta, the monastery in Tell Basul in the Beth She’an Valley, the church at ‘Evron, the church at Hazor-Ashdod, and in the church at Shavei Zion with the same square at the bottom (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 20–21, 59–60, 67–69, 127, 137–138, Pls. XIII, XIV:2, XLIX:2, L:1, LXXVIII, CXLVI, CLXXIII, Nos. 18, 80, 93, 215, 235).

*Crosses* – crosses of different types are found in different areas of the churches, chapels, and monasteries, visible to all, especially in passages between one area and another. Some crosses have also been discovered in secular buildings (Habas 2015; 2020 and sites and references therein).

*Populated vine scrolls* – the vine scroll carpet has survived only in part, limiting the discussion, and yet alongside

individual motifs of a variety of birds characteristic of populated vine carpets, depictions from the grape harvest cycle (the harvester, the donkey and the donkey leader, the rabbit eating a bunch of grapes, and the fox) have survived. The vintage cycle is common in populated vine scrolls (Hachlili 2009: 149–155), as in the monastery of Lady Mary and the upper pavement tomb chamber at El Hammām at Beth She’an, and the church at Hazor-Ashdod (Avi-Yonah 1936: 14–17, Pls. XIV–XV, XVI:2; Fitzgerald 1939: 9, Pls. XVI–XVI; Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: 29–31, 68, Pls. XXIV, XXVI:1–2, LXXIII:1, LXXVI:2, Nos. 26–27, 93). It is extremely common in Jordan, found in the Church of the Holy Martyrs Lot and Procopius and the Lower Chapel of the Priest John at Khirbat al-Mukhayyat; the Church of the Deacon Thomas, the Lower and Upper Churches of Kaianus at ‘Uyun Musa Valley; the Church of the Bishop Sergius and the Church of St. Stephen at Umm al-Rasas; the Chapel of Suwayfiyah in Philadelphia area; and in the Chapel of Elias, Maria and Soreg at Gerasa (Piccirillo 1993: 164–165, 176, 187, 189–190, 234, 238, 264, 296, Figs. 202–207, 313, 234–236, 240, 238–239, 253, 255, 263, 271, 274–275, 345, 365, 369, 382–383, 470, 513, 572).

Sometimes there is only an individual episode, especially a crouching rabbit as in the Church of Bishop Johannes at Ḥorbat Barqa (Gan Yavne; Habas 2012: 132, 137; 2016: 105\*, Fig. 36), the Monastery of Martyrius at Ma’ale Adummim (Magen and Talgam 1990: 110–114, Figs. 25–26, 32), and the church at Petra (Waliszewski 2001: 228, Pl. on p. 311). A rabbit and a fox appear in the Church of the Holy Martyrs (al-Khadir) at Madaba (Lux 1967: Taf. 34: b).

*Mongoose fights a snake* – this episode is not common in our region, but also adorns the ‘Orpheus Mosaic’ of the funeral chapel at Jerusalem (Bagatti 1952: 147–148, Fig. 2; Gorzalczany and Rosen 2018: 87; Rosen 1984: 182; Vincent 1901: 437),<sup>15</sup> and in the populated vine scrolls of the church at Horvat Be’er Shem’a (Gazit and Lender 1993: 274–276; Gorzalczany and Rosen 2018: Fig. 8), and originates in the classical sources and Hellenistic-Roman art, moving from there into Byzantine art. The scene originally belongs to the Nilotic repertoire and has variants of mongoose fighting crocodile and stork/flamingo fighting snake in a Nilotic landscape.

Struggling against snakes is depicted in the Church of the Multiplying of the Loaves and Fishes at Tabgha (Schneider 1937: 61, Tables A, 10), and a stork killing a snake appears in the Nile Festival Building at Sepphoris (Weiss and Talgam 2002: 61, Fig. 5). In Sede Nahum the episode was not part of a Nilotic landscape, but removed from it to a neutral vine scroll, as appears also in the Church of St. Christophe at Qabr Hiram and the church at Zaharni, Lebanon, or in the church at Huarte, Lebanon, where it is depicted against a background of scales and buds. According to Balty the depiction originated in pattern books, and this is the reason for its distribution

<sup>15</sup> Vincent and Bagatti were identified the animal against the snake as a salamander, while Rosen was correctly identified as mongoose.

(Balty 1995: 217–226, Pls. XLI:2; XLII:1–2; Donceel-Voûte 1988: 411–412, 430–431, Fig. 430, Pl. on p. 413).

However, this scene has a special Christian interpretation. According to the *Physiologus*, 26<sup>16</sup> the mongoose protected itself before a fight with lumps of mud, a detail that was known in pagan sources. The Christian commentator saw in this act the incarnation and recognized the struggle between the mongoose and the serpent as Jesus' victory over Satan. Therefore, the depiction of this scene on the mosaic floors in our region must be understood not just as another episode related to the hunting and animal chase cycles, but as subject to religious moral interpretation - with the deep Christian symbolic significance of the struggle against Satan, the struggle against sin, the struggle between good and evil, and in this way, Christianity gave a new interpretation to the old Nilotic subject (Balty 1995: 224–226). Moreover, the depiction of this scene in Orpheus composition, which depicts predators and pray together emphasizes the eschatological meaning of the peace in the End of Days.

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<sup>16</sup> The *Physiologus*, 'Natural Historian', is a didactic Christian text written in Greek in the second century CE. The *Physiologus* provides

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## Shivta Mosaics

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*The paper discussed for the first time three colored mosaic pavements that were discovered ninety years ago at Shivta and its vicinity by the Colt Expedition. Previous studies focused on the mosaic Greek inscriptions but did not consider other aspects. The reason for that was that one mosaic had been covered in order to protect it and the second mosaic was destroyed soon after its exposure. The removal of the modern layer covering the first floor enabled us to study it closely and the discovery of a photo of the second mosaic, as well as some archival documents, allow us to determine that a mosaic with personifications of the four rivers of Paradise adorned the bema of the Central Church. The third mosaic was uncovered during recent renovation work beneath the modern floor of the guest lounge of Colt's house. The three colored mosaics contribute to our understanding of the Byzantine art in the central Negev.*

KEYWORDS: MOSAIC; BYZANTINE ART; FOUR RIVERS OF PARADISE; SHIVTA; ART IN THE NEGEV.

### Introduction

During the 1930s an archaeological expedition led by Harris Dunscombe Colt (1901–1973) conducted large-scale excavations at the Byzantine site of Shivta (Baly 1935; Colt 1948). The excavation unearthed three large churches (the North, Central, and South Church) and a mosque, near the two public reservoirs at the southern end of the site, as well as c. twenty large private houses, streets, and three winepresses (Figure 1; Moor 2013; Negev 1993; Rosenthal 1974; Segal 1983, 1988). The village flourished during the 5th–6th century AD and declined during the Early Islamic period (7th–9th century AD; Hirschfeld 2003; Tepper *et al.* 2018). Many of the inscriptions found at Shivta were unearthed during the excavations of the three churches and were published by Avraham Negev (Negev 1981) and Leah Di Segni (Di Segni 1997). The majority of the excavation findings remained unpublished, with the exception of the corpus of inscriptions, three plans and several dozen photos of Colt's excavations. A study of the Shivta excavation project conducted by the Zinman Institute of Archeology at the University of Haifa (2017–2019)<sup>1</sup> examined dozens of additional documents and finds from Colt's excavations that were located in the mandatory archive at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem. Among these documents was a reference to a shipping case (a suitcase) that was lost at the Port of Haifa in 1938, which contained artifacts, documents and photos belonging to the Colt Expedition. Examination of the documents confirmed that the suitcase was transferred to the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem. A recent study confirmed that the documents found at the Rockefeller are the ones from the missing shipping case (Peleg and Tepper



Figure 1. Location Map, the site, its Churches and location of three Mosaics (Sapir AD; according's Hirschfeld 2003).

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(Grant 340–14). Research was conducted under licenses from the Israel Antiquities Authority G-87/2015, G-4/2016.

2019). The many finds include bone, metal, glass and stone vessels. These were recently published and are the only finds published so far from Colt's excavations that have a direct archaeological connection to the site (Tepper 2019).

This article will present for the first time three colored mosaics, two unearthed *in situ* (hereinafter A-B), by the Colt Expedition at Shivta<sup>2</sup> and the third (hereinafter C), found out of context, at the expedition house of the site.

### Mosaic A

A colorful mosaic with geometric ornaments and a Greek inscription (Di Segni 1997: AD 607; Negev 1981: AD 516/7) was unearthed in the chapel of the northern church (Figure 2; see also Negev 1993; Rosenthal 1974; Segal 1986). The modern (c. 30-year-old) layer covering up the mosaic floor between the baptistery and the nave in the Northern Church chapel was recently removed. The dimensions of the chapel mosaic are: 15.30m width and 18.20m long and the apse mosaic 10.50m width and 7.40m long. Probes dug in gaps in the central panel of the mosaic, and to the west of the chancel screen, revealed two important facts. (1) the mosaic floor predates the construction of the chancel screen, (2) the mosaic was

originally set when the apse was slightly larger. Its size was later reduced due to a new facing. After conservation work accompanying the exposure of the mosaic, focused on stabilizing, and protecting the remains, the mosaic was revealed again and presented by the Nature Parks Authority (NPA; Tepper and Bar Oz 2020: Area D).

The rectangular area of the chapel's *bema* was paved with one mosaic carpet and the semicircular recess of the apse with another (Figure 3). At the western edge of the rectangular carpet a Greek dedicatory inscription is located. The text reads as follows: 'Under the most holy bishop Thomas this work has been completed, by the care of John the priest and of the clarissimus John the vicarious, in the month of Daisios of the 10th induction' (Di Segni 1997:840–842; Negev 1981: 60–61). Remarkably, the two-line inscription was set within the frame of the mosaic carpet and not as customary within *tabula ansata*. The meeting point between the inscription and the red wave band that frames the mosaic carpet seems rather odd, perhaps suggesting that the inscription is a later addition. The letters of the lower line of the inscription were slightly cut by a row of dressed stones inserted in a later renovation when a chancel screen was erected.



Figure 2. Mosaic A: The Northern Church chapel, Shivta (Yotam Tepper).

<sup>2</sup> We didn't discuss here two white mosaics found during Colt's excavation at Shivta: the first, in Insula II, cleaned during the 2019s

season (see: Tepper and Bar Oz 2020, Area H) and the second, in the atrium of the Northern Church.





*Figure 3. The Northern Church chapel; Mosaic adorning the apse (Yotam Tepper).*

The rectangular mosaic carpet is composed of interlacing bands that form alternating circles and pointed oval units, which together enclose a square. The carpet formerly comprised twenty-four squares, but only six remained. They are located in the eastern part of the mosaic. The squares are decorated with different geometric and floral patterns. The southern and northern squares in the eastern line are decorated with a Solomon note flanked by four buds. The second square from the south in this line is decorated with plaited pattern of fillets. The southern square in the second line from the east is decorated with schematic rosette composed of eight intersecting leaves in red brick and ocher. The four corners of the square bear stylized plants. The northern square in the same row is decorated with a shield of squares and the corners of the square are filled with schematic buds. The northern square in the third line from the east is ornamented with two diagonals that crossed each other. Each of them is formed by a row of leaves: one row is red and the other yellow.

The chronological range of the interlacing bands of the type that appears at Shivta supports the dating suggested by Leah Di Segni, AD 607. The earliest appearance of this pattern is in the time of Justinian, but they are limited in size and number. It appears for example in a church, dated to the 6th century AD, at Beit Jimal (Magen and Kagan 2012b: 81, fig. 206.5) and in the Chapel of Elias, Maria and Soreg at Gerash (Piccirillo 1993: 296). However, the

pattern is especially popular in the 7th and first half of the 8th century AD. It appears in the following floors: The Church of Saint Peter at Rihab, dated to AD 623 (Piccirillo 1993: 314–315), the northern aisle in the Church of Saint Stephen at Umm al-Rasas, dated to AD 719–720 (Piccirillo 1993: 219), the Lower Church of Al-Quwaysmah, dated to AD 717/18 (Piccirillo 1993: 266), and the church at Shunah in the territory of Livias, laid in the Umayyad period (Piccirillo 1993: 322–323).

The mosaicists at Shivta made use of limited palette, which includes white, black, light grey, two shades of red, pink, ocher and dark beige. The craftsmen used tesserae of one size: about 64 Per 1 dm<sup>2</sup>.

The mosaic adorning the apse was made from similar tesserae and the two carpets are well integrated (see Figure 3). The main pattern of the mosaic in the apse is a grid of squat hexagons and squares outlined by black tesserae. Each hexagon is decorated with a diamond composed of a series of tesserae in four colors. The carpet frame consists of four rows of tesserae, one row of black tesserae, two rows of white tesserae and another row of black tesserae. At the edges of the geometric mosaic is a white mosaic laid diagonally. The chronological range of this pattern is very long. It started to appear in the region in the 4th and 5th century AD, for example in the monastery at Mevo Modi'im (Magen and Kagan 2012a: 233), and continued

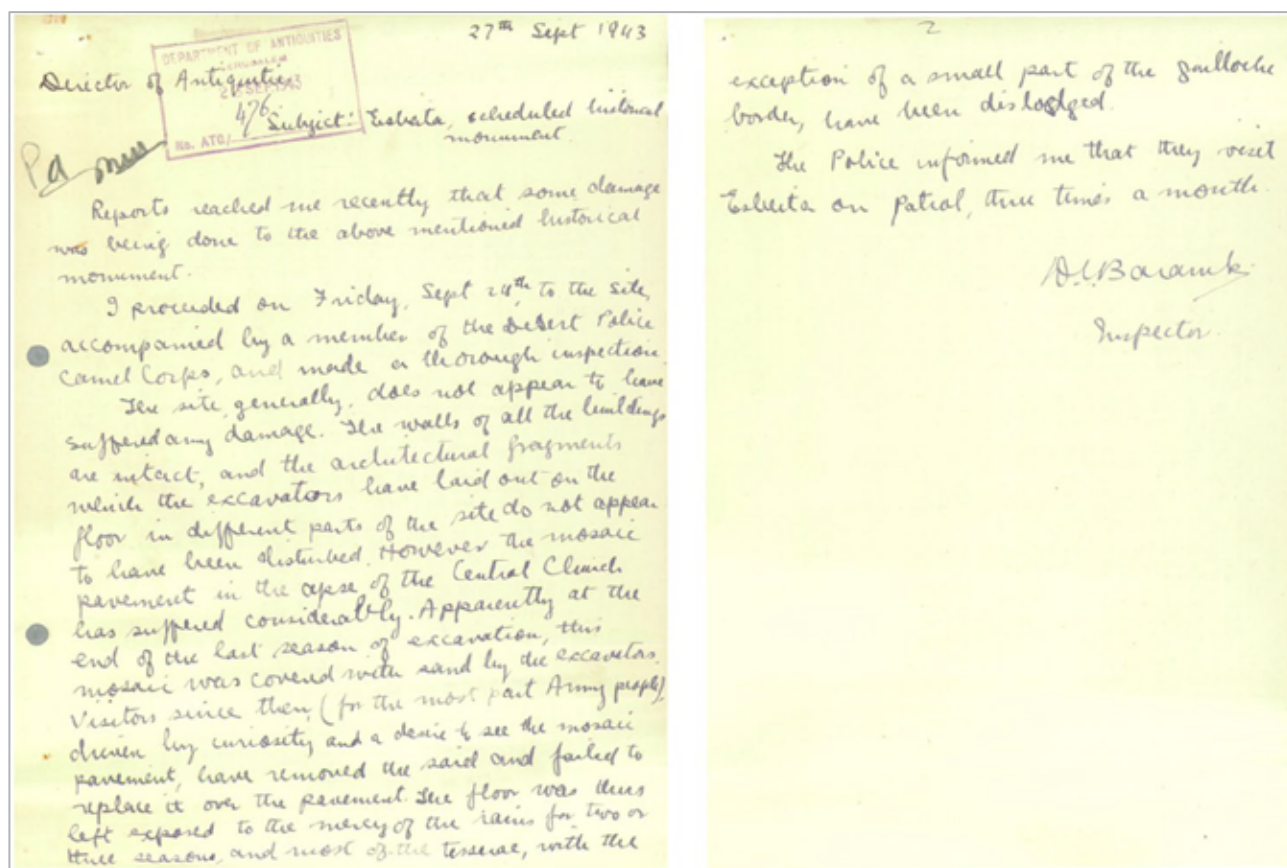


Figure 4. Baramki's letter after a visit to Shivta (27-09-1943; two pages).

along the 6th and 7th century AD, as can be seen at Khan Saliba (Magen and Kagan 2012a: 298), Khirbet Umm Leisun (Magen and Kagan 2012b: 92–93), Khirbet Hubeila (Magen and Kagan 2012b: 133–134), the Good Samaritan Church, near Ma'ale Adummim (Magen and Kagan 2012a: 311); the Church of Priest Wa'il at Umm al-Rasas (Piccirillo 1993: 242–243) and the Church of Saint Mary at Rihab (Puccirillo 1993: 311). In contrast to the pattern in the rectangular carpet, the geometric motifs in the mosaic of the apse cannot serve as dating criteria. Nevertheless, the fact that the pattern adorning the floor of the apse remained in use in the 6th and 7th century AD does not weaken the suggestion that the entire floor should be dated to the second half of the 6th or beginning of the 7th century AD.

### Mosaic B

An inspection conducted at UCL's archives in England found additional documents and photos from Colt's estate, including those belonging to the archaeological expedition to Shivta.

In one of the photos in the archive (unnumbered photo), another mosaic floor is documented (hereinafter mosaic B). Examination of additional documents at the Rockefeller Museum Archive revealed clear reference to

the mosaic that was uncovered at the *Bema* of the central church (Figure 4; see also Peleg and Tepper 2019).<sup>3</sup>

This mosaic includes a Greek inscription and is mentioned in the corpus of inscriptions of Avraham Negev (1993: 66). Records of its exact location on the site are lost.

An additional document was found in the Israel Antiquities Authority mandatory archive at the Rockefeller Museum, a handwritten letter with the subject 'Eisebita seclused historical monument'. The letter was written by Dimitri Constantine Baramki, at that time an inspector of the antiquities department, after a visit to Shivta (September 1943) and addressed simply to the director of antiquities (see Figure 4). The purpose of Baramki's visit was to conduct an inspection at Shivta, following reports of damage being done to the site. And indeed, Baramki's letter reports of a mosaic damaged in the *bema* of the central church (mosaic B above). By Baramki's report, it seems a layer of sand that covered the mosaic at the end of Colt's excavations was removed by 'army people' who visited the site from time to time. During the years the exposed mosaic was damaged by men and nature until it was almost destroyed. The only segment that was left is part of the guilloche border.

The photo that was found at UCL's archives demonstrates a mosaic that is bordered by a guilloche (Figure 5). Several features indicate that the mosaic on the photo once

<sup>3</sup> We wish to thank the staff of the IAA Scientific Archive for all their help. See: <http://www.iaa-archives.org.il/archives.aspx>.



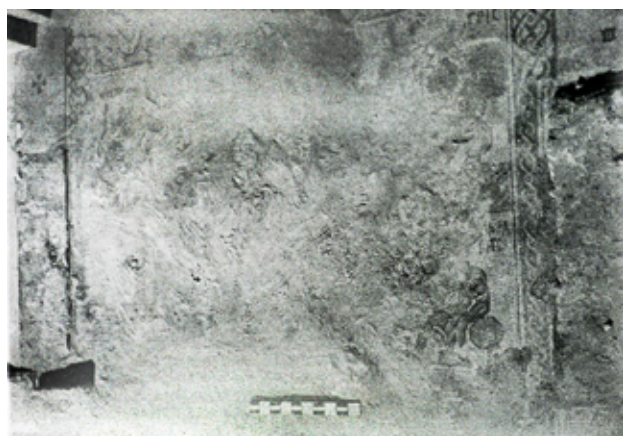


Figure 5. The photo found at UCL's archives in England of Mosaic B.

decorated the rectangular *bema* adjacent to the apse of the central church: (1) A small rectangular recess at the meeting point of the north-eastern pilaster and the northern corner of the apse. (2) Stones that frame the northern and southern edges of the paved area and a fragment of a chancel screen slab located near the north-western corner of the mosaic. (3) A closer look at the photo reveals in the plaster two- or three-square marks that the feet of the altar left on the plaster. These features also appear in a ground plan of the Central Church drawn by Colt's archaeological expedition. The plan that has not been published yet in any scholarly work is posted on the site of Bonhams auction house (<https://www.bonhams.com/auctions/27097/lot/164/>).<sup>4</sup>

From the photos of the mosaic and the ground plan we learn that the stones that surrounded the *bema* did not reach the pilasters that flanked the apse. A passageway paved with mosaic was left on each side of the *bema*. These passages connected the main apse to the subsidiary apses. The northern one was decorated with four buds that formed a cross and the mosaic of the southern passage is decorated at its center with a lozenge. A stripe of interlacing lozenges demarcates the frame that separates the two passages from the main panel. The stripe that runs along the stones that surrounds the *bema* on the southern and northern sides is narrower and is composed of a single guilloche.

Although the mosaic is only partially preserved there is no doubt concerning the content of the main carpet. One may discern traces of three human images identified by Greek inscriptions. The best-preserved figure is the one on the lower right portion of the panel (Figure 6). As indicated by the inscription, this is a personification of the river Euphrates. The river is depicted as a half-naked male figure. Euphrates is reclining on a turned amphora with water flowing from it. Above the personification of Euphrates, as specified by the Greek inscription, reclines the personification of Tigris leaning his arm on a turned amphora. The amphora is clearly visible, and half of the head is seen. On the upper left side, the inscription Pishon remained intact and beneath it the naked torso and massive

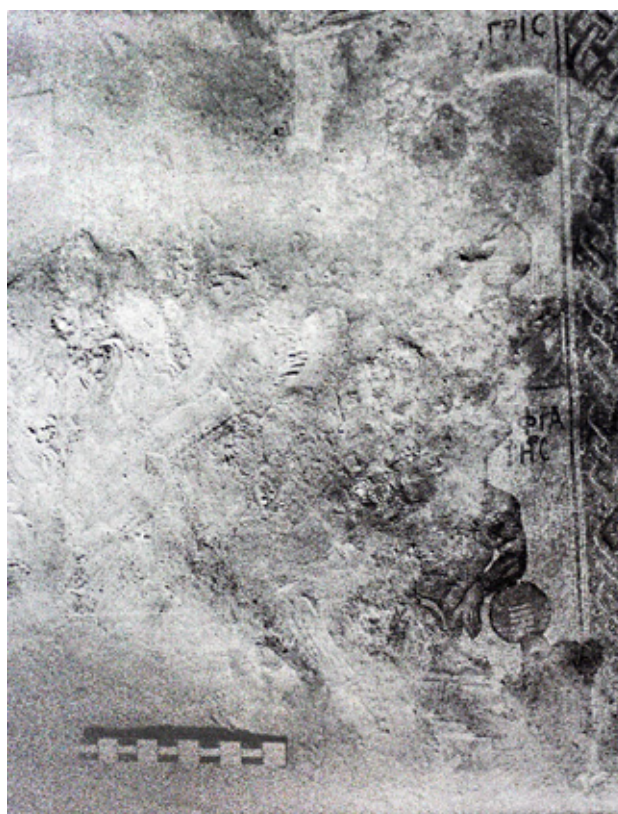


Figure 6. The personifications of Euphrates and Tigris.

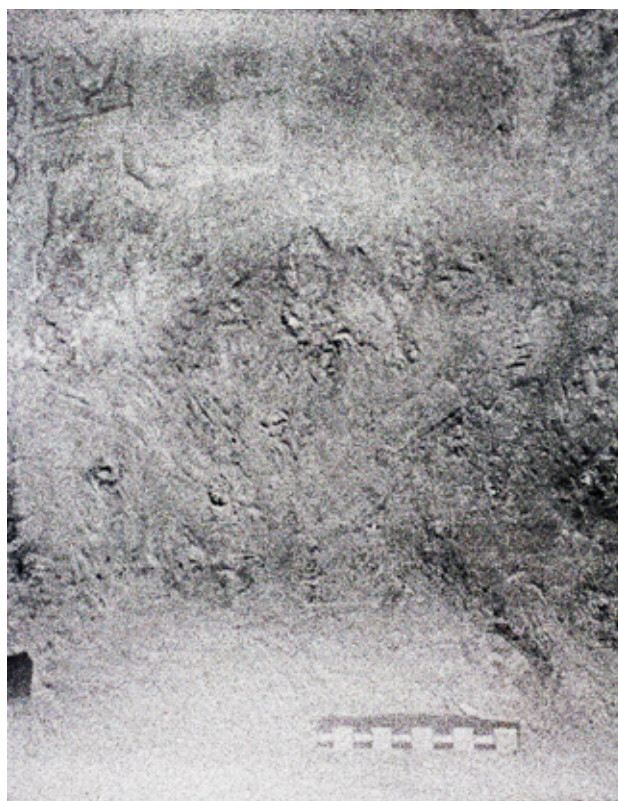


Figure 7. The inscription and personification of Pishon.

arms of an additional reclining male figure (Figure 7). The personification of the river Gehon and the inscription

<sup>4</sup> We would like to thank Dr. Arie Eran, Hecht Museum (Haifa) Director and Curator, for drawing our attention to this plan.



Gehon that most probably adorned the lower left part of the mosaic carpet has not been preserved.

The four rivers of paradise are a familiar theme in Christian art of Late Antiquity. There are three basic iconographical types:

1. The rivers appears as personifications, either as busts rising out of water or as full figures seated on the ground and leaning over a turned amphora. The use of anthropomorphic representations of natural phenomena is a well-known feature in Greek and Roman art that remained familiar in Late Antiquity.
2. The rivers of paradise are depicted as four streams issuing from the bottom of a mount upon which stands the Lamb of God, an eagle or a cross.
3. The rivers are presented in an abbreviated manner by turned vases with water flowing and a plant emerging from them or by schematic streams. Their identification as the four rivers of paradise is based on the accompanying inscriptions. This way of rendering was preferred at the height of the iconoclastic crisis, as demonstrated by the western panel in the Chapel of Theotokos in Wadi Ayn al-Kanisah (Jordan) that was made in AD 762 (Piccirillo and Alliata 1999: 363–364).

Paulinus of Nola, in a letter describing the apse mosaic in his new basilica of St. Felix, provides an explanation of the second type: ‘He [Christ] himself, the rock of the Church, stands upon the rock, from which flow four sonorous springs, the evangelists, leaving streams of Christ’ (Ex 32, 10, CSEL 29, 286; following Underwood 1950: 72–73). The perception that the rivers following from Ecclesia represent the evangelists already appears in the 3rd century AD, as indicated by a letter of Saint Cyprian (Ep 73, 10, CSEL 3, pt. 2; G. Hartel (ed.); following Underwood 1950: 73). In the 4th century AD Ambrose of Milan expounds these ideas and writes: ‘There was the fountain which watered paradise. What is this fountain if not Jesus Christ! The fountain of life is eternal just like the Father; as it is written... ‘out of his body shall flow the living water’ (John 7: 38). (Ambrose of Milan, *Liber de Paradiso*, PL 14, 296B). The identification of Jesus as the fountain of life from which the four rivers of Paradise emerge (Genesis 2: 10) was well-known in Late Antiquity. It is reflected, *inter alia*, in minor objects and mosaic floors in the Middle East. The most impressive among these representations is the secondary *bema* mosaic in the Church of Tayibat al-Imam, near Hamah in Syria, dated to AD 442. At the bottom of the mosaic is a large river with fishes and waterfowl being fed by the water of the four rivers of Paradise (Campanati 1999: 173–177). On the mountain from which flow the four rivers, identified by inscriptions, stands an eagle. Above the eagle is a lamb inside a pavilion, flanked on both sides by peacocks, and a pavilion holding a basin on a pedestal. The upper register includes depictions of Bethlehem, Jerusalem and phoenixes.

The four rivers of Paradise issuing from the hill of Golgotha also appear on an ampulla from Jerusalem bearing a depiction of the crucifixion. The depiction

expresses the perception of the cross as the new tree of life. The vertical arm of the cross is rendered in the form of the trunk of a palm tree; the body of Christ has undergone a process of dematerialization, and his head appears above the cross. In the inscription surrounding the scene the cross is labeled ‘the tree of life’ (Grabar 1958: pl. 16). A clay stamp for the sacramental bread, which was made in 6th century AD Palestine, bears a depiction of a cross on the hill of Golgotha with the four rivers of Golgotha. The cross is flanked by two trees and the figures of St. Peter and St. Paul. The inscription along the margins clarifies the iconography and relates to the significance of the sacramental bread: ‘The origin of life is the cross, the blessing of the Lord be upon us’ (Glavaris 1970: 145–147).

The four personifications of the mosaic from Shivta matches the first iconographical type, but its location around the altar hints that it embodies ecclesiastical, Christological and liturgical symbolism. The closest parallel to the mosaic of Shivta in our region is the mosaic around the baptismal font in the church complex near Jabaliyah north of Gaza (Humbert 1999: 216–218). Four personifications of the rivers of Paradise portrayed as busts surround the baptismal font just as the personifications of the rivers of Paradise framed the altar of the church. According to Henry Maguire, the depiction of the rivers of Paradise next to a baptistery aimed to denote the baptismal water the significance of ‘Fountain of life’ that shared its water with the four rivers of Paradise, as described in Genesis 2: 6 and 2: 10 (Maguire 1999: 179–184). As we shall see below allegorical and liturgical significance can be attributed to the four rivers of Paradise surrounding the church’s altar at Shivta.

Deeper understanding of the significance of the depiction of the rivers of Paradise at Shivta requires consideration of additional early Christian texts on Paradise, as well as cautious attention to the liturgical context and location within the church.

As indicated by Alessandro Scafi (2010: 210–220) and Guy Stroumsa (2010: 1–14), from the beginning of Christianity biblical exegetes had to face the challenge of the meaning of Garden of Eden described in Genesis. The disputes concern the location of paradise in both space and time (Scafi 2006: 34–36). Paradise could belong to primeval times, to the present, or to a future epoch of messianic salvation on earth. Part of the dispute is the result of the ambiguity of term *miqdedem* that opens the description of Eden in Genesis 2: 8: ‘And the Lord God planted a garden *miqdedem* in Eden’. The Hebrew term *miqdedem* has two different meanings, one referring to space (‘away to the east’) and the other to time (‘from before the beginning’). The translators of the Bible had to choose between the two options and their decisions were different. The translators of the Septuagint chose the spatial meaning, but the *Peshitta* (the Syriac translation of the Bible) and Jerome for the Vulgate translated *miqdedem* as ‘from the beginning’ (Scafi 2006: 35). The location of the rivers of Paradise in the eastern end of the central church at Shivta indicates that the planer of the mosaic presumed that Paradise is located in the east.

Among the Late Antique writers one can distinguish two main tendencies concerning the significance of Paradise: allegorical reading versus literal interpretation (Stroumsa 2010: 9). Clement of Alexandria and Origen are perhaps the best-known among the writers of the allegorical group. Clement writes: 'Our gnosis and spiritual paradise is the Saviour himself: we are planted in him, being transferred and transplanted from the old life into good soil. And with this change of plantation comes the growth of much fruit.' (*Strom.*, VI, I, 2, 4). For Origen Eden is a state of bliss rather than a place on earth. He understood the Garden of Eden as an image of the Church and the Tree of Life as an allusion to Christ (Scafi 2006: 38–39). St Ephrem admits that paradise can only be described in terrestrial terms, but it is crucial to understand that these terms are purely metaphorical (Brock 1990: 153). Thus, he writes: 'Do not let your intellect be disturbed by mere names, for Paradise has simply clothed itself in terms that are akin to you...' (*Hymns of Paradise* XI. 7; Brock 1990: 157).

Origen and Ephrem opposed some more literalist observations of paradise that were present in early Christianity, such as the view of Teophilus of Antioch, who writes: 'the divine Scripture clearly teaches us that paradise is under this very heaven under which are the East and the earth.' (*To Autolycus*, II. 24). This line of thought was continued by Late Antique Christian writers of Antioch, who promoted a historical reading of Genesis and literal reading of the geographical aspects of paradise. The prominent representative of these school of thoughts are John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Severian, bishop of Gabala (Scafi 2006: 39–40). In their view paradise was an earthly region in the east and the trees that God planted there were real trees. Epiphanius of Salamis also advocated a literal reading of Genesis (Scafi 2006: 40). The representation of the rivers of Paradise as personifications – an artistic formula common in depictions of topographical elements and natural phenomena such as earth, sea, the seasons of the year, the months and rivers – indicates a perception of Paradise as an earthly region.

The identification of Paradise with the church is common in early Christian thought. The equation of the Church with paradise already appears in the 3rd century AD, as designated by a letter of Saint Cyprian: 'Ecclesia, setting forth the likeness of paradise, includes within her walls fruit-bearing trees [which] she waters with four rivers, that is, with the four Gospels wherewith, by a celestial inundation, she bestows the grace of saving baptism. Can anyone water from ecclesia's fountain who is not within Ecclesia?' (*Epistula* 73, 10, G. Hartel (ed.), CSEL, III, part 2, 785; Maguire 1987: 27). The association of the Church with paradise can also be found in the panegyric on the Church of Holy Zion in Jerusalem delivered by John II, bishop of Jerusalem from AD 387 to 417 (Van Esbroeck 1973: 283–304; Esbroeck 1984: 115–125) and Ephrem the Syrian also declared the Church on earth as a kind of paradise and likened the fruits of Paradise with the Eucharist (*Hymns on Paradise* 6: 8). A similar linkage between Paradise and the church appears in the Syriac Cave of Treasures III. 17–21: 'now Eden is the Holy

Church, and the Church is the compassion of God, which He was about to extend to the children of men...Eden is the Holy Church, and the Paradise which was in it is the land of rest, and the inheritance of life, which God hath prepared for all the holy children of men' (Talgam 2014: 222).

In the floor mosaics of the churches of Palestina and Arabia the representation of Paradise in the church was attained in of two ways:

1. Through depiction of fruit trees, sometimes shown next to the donors, or of the comradeship (*Philia*) between predators and their prey. The depiction of fruit trees as an important part of the Christian image of earthly paradise is based on Genesis 2: 8–9. The placement of most of these representations in the *bema* or in the eastern part of the nave adjacent to the chancel screen indicates the redemption that is the legacy sought by believers who participate in the church liturgy. Anyone who takes part in the church sacrament ensures his entry into a world that has been redeemed from the ancient sin (Talgam 2014: 219–224).

2. The other way of presenting Paradise in a church was by a portrayal of the personification of the four rivers of Paradise, generally as part of a Christian topographic depiction. This can be seen, for example, in the central panel of the Church of St Paul at Umm el-Rasas, probably dated to AD 578. At the center of the geometric mosaic carpet is a depiction of Ge (the personification of earth), surrounded by personifications of the seasons of the year and personifications of the four rivers of paradise. East of this panel is a panel which contains fruit trees and figures of benefactors (Piccirillo 1997: 375–394). A similar scheme is also found in the Chapel of the Martyr Theodorus in the Cathedral of Madaba, dated to AD 562 (Piccirillo 1993: 117; Piccirillo 1981: 299–322). Personifications of the rivers of Paradise identified by Greek inscriptions are portrayed in the four corner octagons of the mosaic carpet adorning the nave. In the *bema*, four trees are depicted in a cruciform pattern together with a pair of gazelles on one side and a pair of lions or a lion opposite a bull on the other. These mosaics resonate the perception that the four rivers of Paradise flow towards the inhabited earth. The most elaborate discussion appears in Constantine of Antioch's *Christian Topography*, in which the author included a map (Kominko 2013: 59–61; Maguire 1987: 22–23). Similar concepts appear in the writings of Ephrem (*Commentarii in Genesim*, I. 23B; Maguire 1999: 180) and the poet Avitus (*Poematum de mosaicae historiae gestis*, PL 59, 329–330; Maguire 1999: 183, note 8).

As mentioned above, the personifications of the rivers of Paradise at Shivta surround the altar of the church on which the Eucharist is offered. This is unexpected, as personifications of natural forces ordinarily appears in the nave, but not in the presbytery. However, there are antecedents to the representation of Paradise in the presbytery, as shown in the apse mosaic of San Vitale in Ravenna and in the apse mosaic of SS. Cosmas and

Damian in Rome. However, in both cases the four rivers of Paradise are depicted as streams of water flowing out from the rocks beneath Christ (seated on a globe in Ravenna or symbolized by a lamb in Rome) and not as personifications. Obviously, the location of the mosaic on the wall or on the floor is significant, but the appearance of personifications on the floor around the altar is extraordinary. This could suggest that the planner of the mosaic floor at Shivta thought of Paradise as located on earth. This reflects a literal interpretation of the text in Genesis (2: 10–14) that describes how the water issues forth from Paradise and divides into the four great rivers of the world. As aforementioned, the idea that the water of Paradise turns into the great rivers of the world was elaborated by several late antique authors, who adhered closely to the Biblical text. Severian, bishop of Gabala in Syria (*Hexaemeron*, PG 56, 478–9), and Constantine of Antioch's (*Christian Topography*) are the most prominent among them. The four rivers of Paradise are regarded as a source of well-being for life on earth. The idea was also accepted by Prokopios of Gaza (*Commentary on Genesis*, PG 87.1, 159–160; Kominko 2013: 61). However, the location of the images of the four rivers near the altar in the Central Church at Shivta indicates that the four rivers additionally signify the sacramental life of the Church.

Byzantine exegetes related to the altar as at once Jesus' tomb, the Golgotha, the table of the last supper, the heavenly altar, and the throne of God. Thus, in his *Commentarius Liturgicus*, Sophronius, patriarch of Jerusalem (AD 560–638) explains the structure and symbolism of the church: the apse originated in the cave in Bethlehem and the cave in which the Lord was buried. The *synthronon* takes in the form of the heavenly throne and is so called because on it sit the Father and Son, and on it sit God-fearing priests, like seraphim. The *prothesis* (altar) is the site of Golgotha, where the Lord was crucified (PG 82.3). The placement of the personifications of the four rivers of Paradise around the church altar in the central church at Shivta is a visual expression of some of these perceptions. The eucharist ceremony on the church altar restores the community of believers to the lost Paradise. Anyone who takes part in the church sacrament ensures his entry into a world that has been redeemed from the ancient sin. The crucifixion of Jesus, which according to church tradition took place in the same place where Adam was created and buried, purified humanity from the original sin and opened the way for its redemption (Talgam 2014: 222–223). Thus, in one of the *hymns on Crucifixion* (IX, 2), St Ephrem writes: 'The sword that pierced Christ removed the sword guarding Paradise' (Brock 1990: 64). And in *Hymn on Virginity* (VIII, 1) he contrasts the Tree of Knowledge, whose fruit brought death to Adam, and the Tree of the Cross, whose fruit restores life to humanity (Brock 1990: 61). We do not know what was depicted on the apse above the altar and whether it related to the mosaic floor. A representation of the bust of Christ, Christ as the

ruler of the universe or a gilded cross seem most reasonable, but this is mere speculation.

The location of Shivta in a harsh arid environment most probably gave the depiction of the four rivers additional significance. The pilgrims on their way to Mount Sinai or on their way back from it arrived to Shivta after a challenging journey in the desert. In contrast to the desert environment, the inhabitants of Shivta managed to gather sufficient water and were not only engaged in sustainable agriculture initiatives, but also, they were able to devote some water to sustaining prestigious gardens, as the one adjacent to the Northern Church (Langgut *et al.* 2020). For the pilgrims walking along the desert routes the churches of Shivta were Eden.

Although depictions of personifications of rivers were common in Byzantine secular buildings of our region in the 5th century AD, personifications of rivers started to appear on floor mosaics of churches only in the mid-6th century. This was part of a larger phenomenon in Christian church mosaics that characterize the second half of the 6th century AD. The repertoire of motifs in church mosaic of this period was broadened to include personifications such as Thalassa, Abyss, Oceanus, Selena, and Sophia (Talgam 2014: 189). The style of the figures in the apse mosaic at Shivta corroborates this dating. Naturalistic depictions and a sense of volume typify the figures on the Shivta mosaic, but the lighting is linear and stylized. These stylistic features indicate that the mosaic was probably completed in the seventh or eight decades of the 6th century AD.

### Mosaic C

As part of Colt's expedition to Shivta, a stone house was built for the expedition at the northwestern entrance of the site. Construction on the building began during the first excavation season and served the expedition members until it was destroyed by a fire together with all its content which included many documents and archaeological artifacts (Peleg and Tepper 2019).

During the last decades, the Colt's house served as a home to the Oach family. After their departure (2020) the Nature Parks Authority conducted large scale conservation and renovation work in order to repurpose the building in the entrance formation to the Shivta National Park. Prior to and during the renovations, a number of colorful mosaic pieces were uncovered beneath the floor of the guest lounge of Colt's house (hereinafter mosaic C). The assumption is that their origin comes from a mosaic that was uncovered by Colt's expedition, although its exact location in the site is unknown.<sup>5</sup> A small segment of the mosaic was treated at the conservation lab of Haifa university (with the help of Ravit Linn), while conservation and treatment of other fragments was

<sup>5</sup> In the scope of our research and the limitations of the data which have been presented above we can't prove the in situ location of the mosaic within the site. It may also be suggested that it originated from one of

the farms near the site or possibly at Mizpe Shivta, a monastery located a 4 km north from the village.



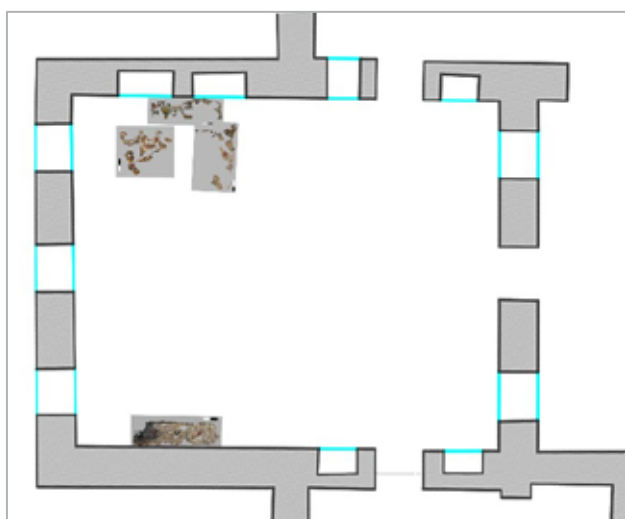


Figure 8. Plan of Colt's house and the locations of the mosaic's fragments (Orit Bortnik).

conducted by Orit Bortnik on behalf of the Nature and Parks Authority.

Four large fragments of mosaic were discovered embedded in a modern concrete foundation in the western part of the guest lounge of Colt's house (Figure 8). The fragments are detached from each other, but it seems that they once belonged to the same floor. A fragment (Figure 9), measuring 1.35m length and 40cm width, was discovered along the southern wall of the guest lounge. The fragment is made of white tesserae set in diagonal lines forming a herringbone pattern and decorated with three diamonds, filled with either red or grey tesserae. The mosaic is bordered on its outer margins by two rows of white tesserae set in horizontal lines. The inner border is a frame composed of one row of white tesserae and one of black, both set in horizontal lines. The entire fragment seems to have originally been part of the edges of the mosaic floor.

The other three fragments of the mosaic floor are located in a row adjacent to the northern wall of the guest lounge. The eastern fragment among the three is an additional part of the white edges of the mosaic floor (Figure 10). It extends along 1m and matches the features of the fragment that has been described above.

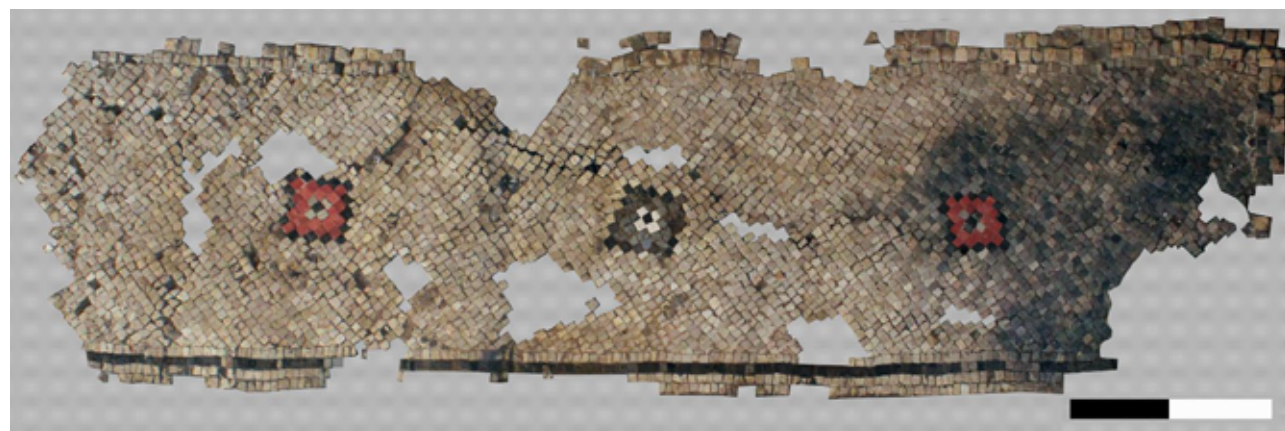


Figure 9. The southern fragment in Colt's house (Orit Bortnik).

The fragment that is located along the northern wall of the guest lounge (Figure 11) seems to have been part of the frame of the mosaic. Its main part is a lotus band, one flower facing inward and the other outward. The lotus flowers gradually change colors. One flower changes color from red to pink and white. Another changes from ochre to light ochre and to white and the third type changes colors from dark grey to light grey and white. The flowers are set against a black background and outlined in black. The lotus band is framed on both sides by a simple band made from a line of black tesserae, two lines of white tesserae and another black line. A fragment of the mosaic's white edges is attached to the mosaic frame. The lotus band is a well-known pattern, especially in the context of the 5th century AD, but it continues to appear in the 6th and even the 7th century AD. The lotus band appears in our regions in various contexts in the 5th century AD, *inter alia*, in the following mosaics: The church at 'Ozem (Habas 2018: 97–120; Talgam 2014: 160), the octagonal memorial building at Capernaum (Corbo 1993: 75), the monastery at Kursi (Tzaferies 1993: 88) and the Orpheus mosaic from Jerusalem (Talgam 2014: 246). The mosaic of Ma'on-Nirim (Avi-Yonah 1960: 86–93) attests the continuity of its use in the 6th century AD and the mosaic of the *beth midrash* in the Synagogue at Meroth (Ilan and Damati 1987: 161) demonstrates that it was still part of the repertoire in the early 7th century AD.

The last fragment in the Colt's house is a segment of the main carpet of the mosaic (Figure 12). The carpet field is decorated with a sequence of interlaced squares and circles formed by two entwined bands, one of which changes colors from black to red and pink, while the second changes color from black to ochre and light ochre. Each medallion has an inner circular row of crowstep. One of the squares contains a quatrefoil and another one a box creating a three-dimensional illusion. The last two motifs are typical, though not exclusive, to floor mosaics of the late 4th and early 5th century AD. Parallels to the quatrefoils appear in the two sites: The northern aisle of a church discovered in 2007 by Moshe Hartal and Edna Amos in Tiberias (unpublished) and Bath D in Antioch (Levi 1947: 428–429). The three-dimensional cuboids motif appears in the above-mentioned church in Tiberias,

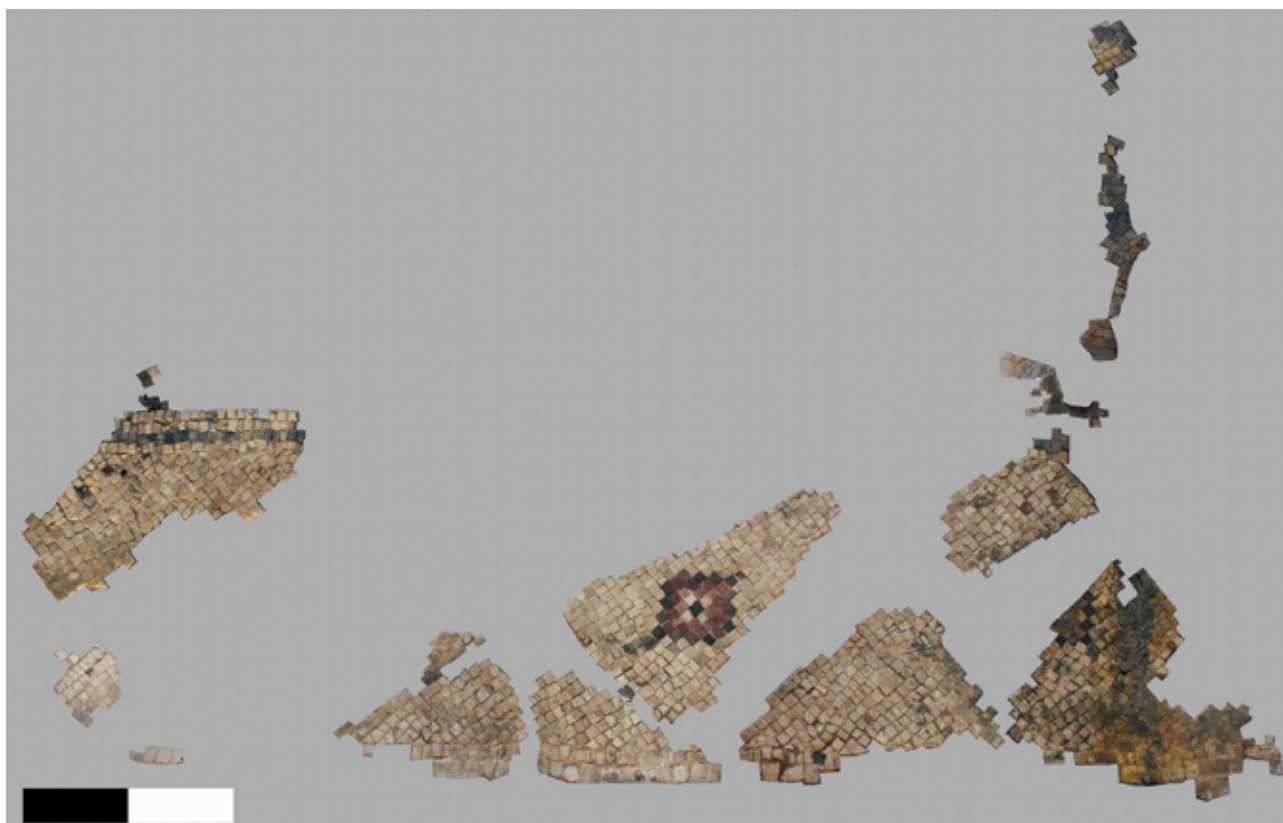


Figure 10. The eastern fragment in Colt's house (Orit Bortnik).



Figure 11: The northern fragment in Colt's house (Orit Bortnik).

in stage IIa in the synagogue of Hammath Tiberias (Dothan 1983: pl. 35, 4), the lower mosaic in the synagogue at Ma'oz Hayim (Tzaferis 1981: 87) and in the synagogue at Khirbet Samara (Magen 2010: 139). We may therefore speculate that Mosaic C is perhaps the earliest mosaic at Shivta. Although colored tesserae are spread over the surface of the *bema* of the Northern Church, we do think that mosaic C were removed from there. Shlomo Margalit's excavations discovered two construction phases in the Area of the *bema* and in his view the sanctuary was altered in the 6th century AD (Margalit 1987). There is a possibility that the mosaic once decorated an early phase in the Southern Church rather than the

Northern Church, but this is uncertain. Other options are that it adorned the baptistery of the Central Church<sup>6</sup> or perhaps, one of the wealthy houses, dug by Colt at the site (Tepper 2019: figs. 1, 4).

### Final Remarks and Conclusions

This article discussed for the first time three mosaics that were discovered almost ninety years ago by Colt's Expedition. The mosaic of the chapel in the Northern Church at Shivta (Mosaic A) was known to scholars, but previous discussions focused on the mosaic Greek inscription and other aspects of the mosaic were ignored. The reason for that was that it had been covered by a layer

<sup>6</sup> The plan of the Central Church, drawn by Colt's archaeological expedition, indicates a mosaic there (see above, note 3).



Figure 12. Segment of the mosaic carpet in Colt's house (Orit Bortnik).

of earth in order to protect it, making it inaccessible for three decades. Its re-exposure enabled us to consider its craftsmanship and motifs. Our study of the mosaic from the perspective of art history managed to shed light on the long debate concerning the dating of the inscription. It seems that the dating suggested by Avraham Negev is too early and preference should be given to the later dating suggested by Leah Di Segni. The *bema*'s mosaic of the Central Church (Mosaic B) is a splendid discovery. The only thing we knew about it was the brief information provided by Avraham Negev: 'In one of the churches of Sbaita the Frs. Saller and Bagatti were shown by members of the Colt Expedition a mosaic with the names of the four rivers of Paradise, Pishon, Gehon, Tigris and Euphrates.' The discovered by Michael Peleg in the UCL's archives of a photo of the mosaic and additional archival documents found in the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem enabled us to determine that the mosaic with the personifications of the four rivers of Paradise decorated the *bema* of the Central Church, to consider its iconography and date it to the late 6th century AD. The depiction of personifications in the *bema* is outstanding. As far as can be said at this stage of the study, mosaic B at Shivta is currently the only mosaic in the central Negev that includes representations of human figures. The discovery of the third mosaic in the guest lounge of Colt's house was a complete surprise. This mosaic is probably the earliest among the three and may support the possibility of an early building phase in the churches at Shivta in late 4th or early 5th century AD. Our study of the three mosaics completes previous studies that concentrated on other media of decorations in the churches at Shivta, including wall paintings (Figueras 2006; Maayan-Fanar: 2017; Maayan-Fanar, Linn, Tepper and

Bar-Oz 2018), marble incrustations (Fischer and Tepper 2021) and architectural sculpture made of local stone (Golan: 2020, 17–55). The investment in church decorations reflects the prosperity of the site in the Byzantine period. However, the number of floor mosaics at the site is low in comparison to the quantity of floor slabs, made of local stone or marble. The mosaics at Shivta's churches and chapels are restricted to the area of the *bema*. The preference to floor slabs characterizes other sites in the central Negev: Nessana, Elusa, Rehovot and Oboda. The reason could reflect an aesthetic preference or is the result of the unavailability of appropriate colorful row material for tesserae in the area.

The discovery of three colored mosaics at Shivta, two of them are unveiled here for the first time since they were first documented by the Colt's expedition in the 1940s, shed new light on the Christian art at the site during the late Byzantine era. Dating two of the mosaics, not before the middle of the 6th century AD, adds data to the ongoing discussion concerning the decline and abandonment of the site.

### Acknowledgment

We are grateful to Robert Winckworth from the UCL Special Collections, Archives and Records department for allowing us to review the Harris Colt box. We appreciate the help of Ian Carroll and Rachael Sparks from the Institute of Archaeology in helping us understand the history and provenance of Colt's box.

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#### Archive

IAA Scientific Archive; ATQ 64/6; Shivta (doc 1: 2395327-040800\_002\_000011; doc 2: 1227638-040800\_002\_000013).

# Mampsis: Mapping the City Following a New Survey<sup>1</sup>

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*This article presents the results of a recent survey of Mampsis, which recorded its urban structures on a new city plan. It focuses on the city's three major phases, turning from a guarded roadside caravanserai in the Nabatean period (1st century BC–1st century AD) into a flourishing and rich Middle Roman city (2nd–3rd centuries AD) and eventually becoming a Christian Byzantine city with two impressive churches (4th–mid-6th centuries AD).*

*The recent identification of a military camp and commander residency point to a military attendance at Mampsis already in the Nabatean Period. Two Latin inscriptions from the military cemetery, dated to Trajan and Hadrian eras, identify two of the burials: a Legio III centurion and an eques of the Cohors I Augusta Tracum.*

*Based on the sums of money specified in the Nessana Papyrus 39, dated to the mid-6th century AD, it seems that the city's financial sustenance was based upon payments given by the authorities to the limitanei for their military service. Once this support ceased by Justinian, probably after AD 532, and no money was available to pay the Saracens off, they invaded Mampsis burning down its main gate.*

KEYWORDS: MAMPSIS; NEGEV; NABATEAN PERIOD; MIDDLE ROMAN PERIOD; BYZANTINE PERIOD; ROMAN GARRISONS; MILITARY CAMP; COMMANDER RESIDENCY; LATIN INSCRIPTIONS; SEAL IMPRESSIONS.

## Introduction

Mampsis (Μάμψις in Greek, *Kurnub* in Arabic, *Mamshit* in Hebrew; Figure 1) was the most eastern and isolated Nabatean city in the Negev, located in the northeastern Negev Highlands.

The identification of *Kurnub* with Mampsis—mentioned by Ptolemy, Eusebius, Hieronymus of Cardia and Hierocles and appearing on the Madaba map—was first suggested by Hartmann (1911) and is fully agreed upon today. Mampsis was mentioned as a *polis* in Georgios Cyprus' list of settlements in the region (AD 527), which was based on Heracles' earlier version of the cities list (Jones 1971: 280). Other settlements in the Negev Highlands, apart from Elusa (Hebrew *Halutza*), were termed villages. Mampsis, although rather small, seems to have gained its status due to its military position.

Surveys of the site began in the nineteenth century, and it was excavated during the second half of the twentieth century, mainly by Abraham Negev (Negev 1993a, and see therein a detailed listing of the historical sources and a history of the exploration of the city) on behalf of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Owing to the rich and well-preserved architectural remains at the site, these explorations and excavations produced rather detailed maps of the city and a good understanding of its urban history. In 1989, the site was excavated by Negev and Israeli (Israeli, in preparation), and in 1993, the remains of Building XXV, erected during the Middle Roman period after the Roman annexation of Nabataea in AD 106, were unearthed by Tali Erickson Gini between the British

Mandate Police Station and the ancient city wall (Erickson-Gini 1996). In 1994, four additional areas were excavated (Erickson-Gini 1999). Since then, Mampsis was left almost unexplored, despite it being one of the most impressive urban sites in Israel and even as new research methods, particularly in aerial photography, were becoming more available.<sup>2</sup>

In 2019, the study of the site resumed with a year-long ground survey of the city. In the survey, using a drone, aerial photographs and orthophoto of the site were used, which recorded with great accuracy its urban structures, agriculture hinterland and various installations. These allowed to draw a new city plan that is more detailed than any of the maps produced following previous surveys and excavations. Moreover, it allowed for a re-examination of the findings of past excavations, resulting in the identification of a military installation in the city.

By presenting the survey results, this paper offers an updated overview of the three phases development of the city proposed by Avraham Negev. Negev's chronological scheme included what he termed Middle and Late Nabatean periods and the Byzantine period (Negev 1967a; 1967b; 1971b; 1993a). These roughly cover: 1) the period of Nabataean rule in the 1st century AD that witnessed the construction of a guarded roadside caravanserai — a period that ended with the annexation of Nabataea in AD 106; 2) the post-annexation period (Middle Roman) between AD 106 and the late 3rd century AD when Mampsis underwent an impressive building program; and 3) the Late Roman / Byzantine period during which most

<sup>1</sup> The article is dedicated to the late Avraham Negev, who revealed, researched, taught, and published the Nabatean culture in the Negev.

<sup>2</sup> Between 2017 and 2020, excavations were conducted under the direction of Tali Erickson-Gini, Anat Rasiuk and Avishai Lev-Hevroni near the Diocletianic gatehouse in Building III as part of an Israel Antiquities Authority educational program coordinated by Orit Aflalo, the head of the Negev Archaeological Center.





Figure 1. Mampsis, looking south.

of the city was walled (late 3rd–early 4th century AD) and churches were built (late 4th century AD) and maintained until the abandonment of the site in the later Byzantine period (mid-6th century AD).

Subsequently, this paper surveys the literature in an attempt to answer two related questions: what was the demographic makeup of the inhabitants of Mampsis during centuries of political, military and religious changes, and how did their city endure and become so wealthy in a rather harsh desert environment in the Negev?

### Mapping Mampsis

Mampsis is situated on the southern margins of a valley in the northeastern Negev Highlands, *c.* 40km southeast of Be'er Sheva' and 5km southeast of Dimona (map ref. 206/548; 460–478 m asl). Three ancient roads led to the city (Figure 2): the road leading from the prosperous Nabatean region around the southern end of the Dead Sea towards Be'er Sheva', the road leading from the copper mining district of Faynan (Phaino) by way of Mezad Hazeva, and the road that connected Mampsis with Oboda.

The city (130 × 150–270m), spanning over 10.5 acres, is set on two hills, eastern (6.5 acres) and western (4 acres, Figure 3), with a ravine running between them, and is bordered by two shallow ravines on the east and the west. A deep seasonal streambed, Nahal Mamshit, runs along the southern margins of the city, then turning to the southeast, cutting through the hard dolomite rock of the Zafit Formation along the Hatira anticline and exposing rocks that served as building material in the city.

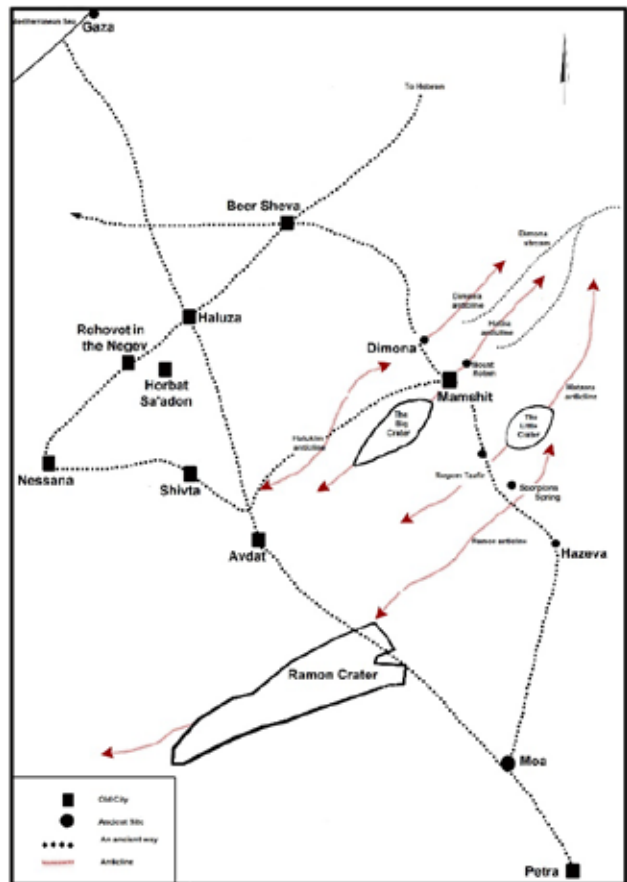


Figure 2. Negev settlements, cities, complexes, and roads (O. Sion and S. Krapiwko).





Figure 3. Structures on the western hill, looking southwest (photo G. Fitoussi).

The ruins of Mampsis, its water-supply system and dams, as well as its cemeteries have been mapped several times since the early 20th century AD (Musil 1908: 17–28, Figs. 10–13; Woolley and Lawrence 1914–1915: 121–128, Fig. 55; Kirk and Guy 1938; Negev 1988a: 20, Fig. 4). These mapping endeavors—including the use of aerial photography in the 1930s (Kirk and Guy 1938) and following the extensive excavations at the site (Negev 1988a; 1988b; 1993a)—resulted in a rather detailed map of the city (Figure 4), an understanding of the city’s history and the nearby roads, along with an appreciation of the ways in which the city inhabitants utilized and manipulated the barren surroundings.

In the 2019 survey, aerial photographs were transformed into an orthophoto of the site (for similar surveys and an explanation of the methods involved, see Dahari and Sion 2018; Sion, Erickson-Gini and Rubin 2019). The walls and structures identified in the orthophoto (for aerial photo identification methods, see Brimer 1986) were authenticated in a subsequent ground survey. They were

then recorded on a comprehensive and detailed city plan presented hereby (Figure 5).<sup>3</sup> While the new city plan records the city at its prime, during the Middle Roman and Byzantine periods, it also presents the structures’ previous strata. It exhibits a wider picture and adds significant data on structure location and identification along the long-life duration of the settlement. The results of the survey also reveal the relation of its urban territory versus agricultural hinterland, the identity of its population and their livelihood.<sup>4</sup>

The residential area covers 15,245sq. m and including public structures sums to 24,540sq. m (c. 60% of the city territory). The city is divided into four quarters: western, central, southwestern, and eastern. Outside the city wall are a caravanserai (VIII) and buildings that Avraham Negev suggested to be an architecture school (XXIII) and a gymnasium (XXII). A large area (40%) within the city remained unbuilt and the empty grounds between the huge

<sup>3</sup> Newly identified Insulae are designated by capital Latin letters, and the buildings within the Insulae are numbered consecutively with Arab numerals. The original Roman numbers of the excavated structures (both insulae and buildings, but originally all labelled ‘Buildings’) appear in parentheses.

<sup>4</sup> The survey was conducted by Ofer Sion of the Israel Antiquities Authority. We would like to thank those who assisted the research: Orit Boratnik and Gil’ad Gabai of the Israel Nature and Parks Authority,

David Zell (mapping by orthophoto), Guy Fitoussi (aerial photography), Dov Porotsky, Silvia Krapiwko and Alex Wiegmann (plans). Participants in the survey included Yehuda Rapuano, Dov Nahlieli, Yonathan Sion, ‘Adi. Kaplan, Lior Alon and Emanuel Eisenberg. We would also like to thank Israel Hason, Yossef Levi, Omri Barzilai and Gideon Avni for their support. Special thanks to Dafnah Strauss-Doron, Viviana Ruth Moscovich and Tali Erickson-Gini for their helpful editorial comments.



Figure 4. City plan (A. Negev and S. Israeli).

buildings served as streets, alleys and piazzas (Figure 5: 1–10).

Buildings were well-preserved and the quality of workmanship exceeds any other city in the Negev. The possibility of comparing the size and composition of the excavated buildings with the unexcavated structures recorded in the survey is an important advantage of this project.

Fifty-six structures were reordered within the city wall: 43 residential buildings, 2 churches, two bathhouses, 3 administration/stores complexes, one pool, an army camp, the officer's residency and 3 unidentified structures. An average building covers *c.* 450sq. m, containing 8 rooms

and a courtyard.<sup>5</sup> Most buildings have a single court, 82sq. m in average (*c.* 30.5% of the building dimensions). Subterranean water reservoirs were quarried in the courtyards and probably existed in nearly every building. Staircase towers found in most buildings indicate a second floor—presumably sleeping rooms. The upper floor was accessed by way of square staircase-towers, which were built around a solid pier (Negev 1973).

Construction techniques were recorded and analyzed by Negev (1967a; 1967b; 1973; 1980; 1988a, 1988b), presenting a high quality of domestic Nabatean architecture. The buildings are spacious, made of finely dressed limestone masonry. Walls are made of three layers (60–80cm wide): exterior hammer-dressed blocks of hard

<sup>5</sup> At Horbat Sa'adon, an average house covers *c.* 252sq. m and has 5 rooms. At Rehovot-in-the Negev, 302sq. m with *c.* 6 rooms (Dahari and Sion 2018; Sion, Erickson-Ginai and Rubin 2019).



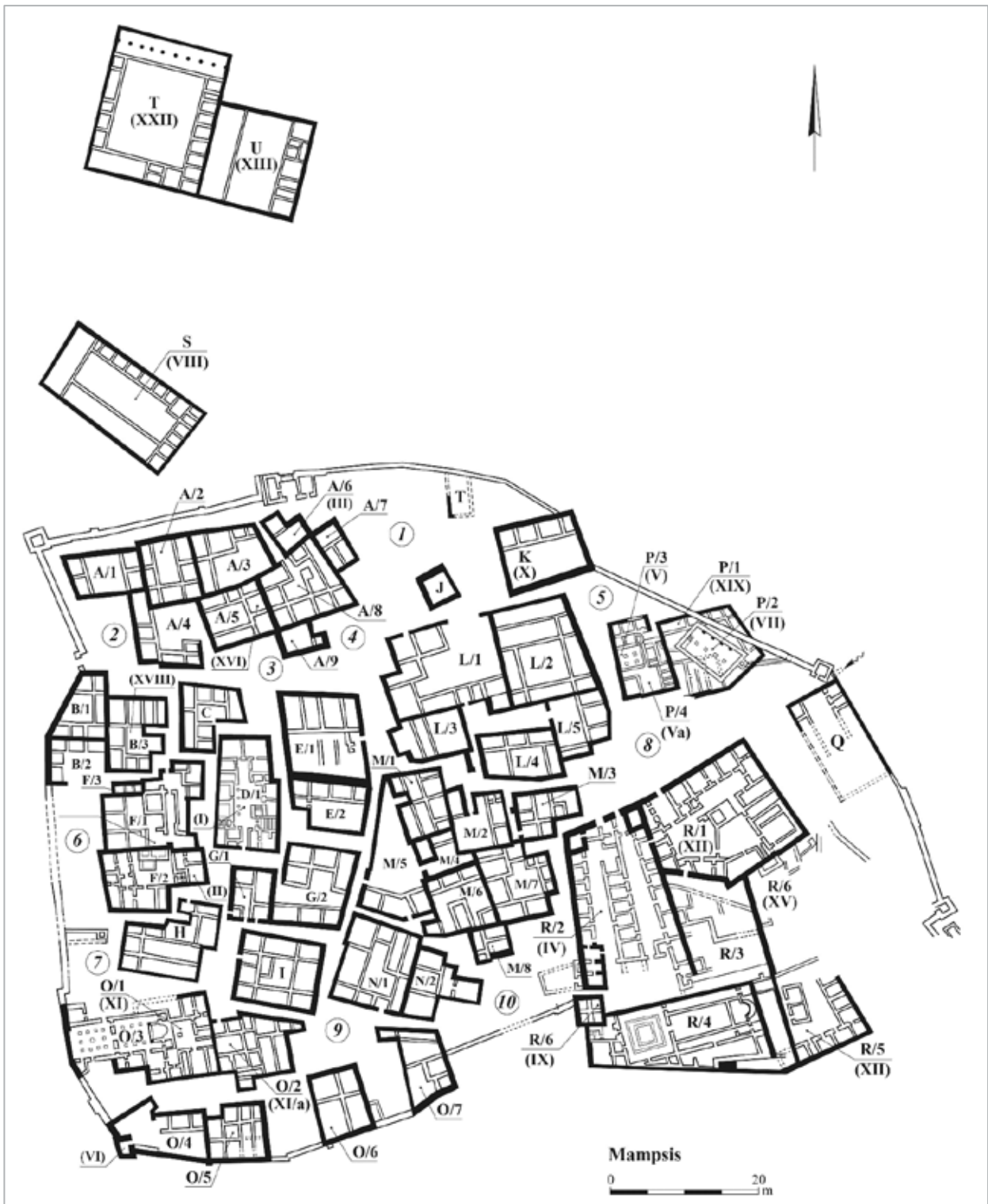


Figure 5. City plan (O. Sion, S. Israeli and D. Porotsky).

limestone, dressed stones that were plastered in the interiors, and small stones and quarry fragments held by mortar in between the two (Shershevski 1986: 48, n. 60). Ceilings were constructed using rectangular stone slabs supported by arches. Various floors were unearthed in different parts of the buildings: stone floors in living rooms, wooden floors in reception halls, beaten-earth floors in service rooms and mosaic floors paved some of the second-floor rooms. Door posts were of wood and windows were scarce and narrow.

The amount of stone invested in the site complexes is estimated at 35000–40000 cubic m. Limestone was available close by and easy to quarry. Flooding in Nahal Mamshit exposed adequate rock layers that were available to quarry. Quarries were observed in two places west of the city. The first spreads over an area of 5 dunams and the second over a nearby hill in an estimated area of 20 dunams. On the southern slope of the stream another quarry was observed over an area of 3 dunams, 3–5m deep.



Figure 6. *Insulae and Structures according to periods* (O. Sion, S. Israeli and D. Porotsky).

### The Urban Development (Figure 6)<sup>6</sup>

#### The Nabatean Period (30 BC–AD 106)

Controlling the Arabian aromatic and spice trade from Arabia to the Mediterranean coast enriched the Nabatean

kingdom. In the end of the 1st century BC, Mampsis was founded as a road station on a secondary caravan route leading from the southern coast of the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean. In that period, a fortress was constructed on top of the hill, a caravanseraï and watchtowers were

<sup>6</sup> The urban development is based on Negev's publications and chronology, updated, and slightly revised by Erickson-Gini (2010: 83–86).



erected on the hill slope and a cemetery to the north of the settlement.

The fortress (R/5; Building XIV) is the earliest structure dated by Negev from the last quarter of the 1st century BC to mid-first-century AD (Negev 1988a: 30–32). It was built on the southeastern hill — the highest place overlooking the road (Figure 7). The square fortress has a courtyard at the center, in which a small structure of two rooms is situated. The outer walls are extremely wide and other rooms are built align them.

The fortress was ruined on several occasions: between the Nabatean and Middle Roman periods, in the Byzantine period when walls were constructed between the Eastern Church and Building XII, and in the 20th century AD when a British Police building was erected. Near the fortress, a small watchtower was found under the southwestern corner of Structure R2 (Building IV). Another watchtower was uncovered in the southwestern corner of the city wall (Building VI) and a third watchtower is in Building II. All three protected the settlement over the steep cliff of Nahal Mamshit (Negev 1988a: 4, 28).

Three structures were built to the north of the fortress. The first has a central small courtyard (P/1; Building XIX) with storage rooms at its southern side, resembling those at Masada. Nabatean and Herodian lamps (somewhat rare in Nabatean assemblages) were revealed in the courtyard, in one of the richest assemblages uncovered at the site (Negev 1988a: 34). An ash layer was observed between the Nabatean period remains and the wall, which was constructed in the Late Roman period over the northern and eastern rooms of the building (Negev 1988a: 32–34). Adjacent to the west is Structure P/4 (Building Va) that

joins a wall with contemporary Structure P/1. Half of Structure P/4 has rooms surrounding a courtyard and a second floor. Negev proposed that the remains of a stylobate and a staircase-tower attest to domestic architecture that was well developed already in Nabatean period (Negev 1988a: 34–37). To the north, Structure K was revealed, which was later integrated into the city wall (Negev 1988a: 44). A large caravanserai (S; Building VIII) was raised outside the city wall, at the foot of the hill. Negev suggested that the large structure (U; Building XXIII) further north was founded in the 2nd half of the 1st century AD as a school for the study of architectural and applied arts (Negev 1993b: 259). The settlement of the Nabatean period probably extended over a larger area than Middle Roman period (Negev 1988a: 27, 30).

Pottery of the earlier Nabatean period was revealed in several buildings of the Middle Roman period, such as Structures D (Building I) and O/1 (Building XI; Negev 1988a: 40–44, 74–75 respectively). The foundations of a watchtower were exposed under the bell tower of the Eastern Church (R/7; Building IX) and early building remains were present under Structure R/2 (Building IV; Negev 1988a: 27, 29, 48–49).

A Nabatean cemetery, discovered by Kirk 1 km northeast of the city was excavated by Negev, and it comprised of primary and secondary burials; it was in constant use for the first four centuries of the settlement (Negev 1971a; Negev and Sivan 1977: 111). The finds from the cemetery enhance our knowledge of the funerary customs, the dating of the settlement and the connection between Mamphis and other administrative centers such as Petra, Rabbathmoba and Characmoba (see below; Negev 1969).



Figure 7. The eastern hill, looking northeast (photo G. Fitoussi).



According to Negev, evidence of a settlement gap between the Nabatean and post-annexation periods were revealed in the 'palace' (D, Building I; Negev 1988a: 74–77) and in both stages of the cemetery (Negev and Sivan 1977: 118–119).

### ***The Middle Roman Period (AD 106–300)***

Following the death of the Nabatean king Rabel II in AD 106, the Romans annexed the Nabatean kingdom to the Roman Empire and founded the new *Provincia Arabia*. New security arrangements led to the construction of a new road—the Via Trajana Nova—completed at AD 114–116. The III Cyrenaica Legion paved the road network in the province and Mampsis appears to have been renovated in the late 1st to early 2nd centuries AD (Negev 1971b).<sup>7</sup>

During the Middle Roman period, in the 2nd and early 3rd centuries AD, Mampsis was rebuilt as an unwallled city and most of the preserved buildings are ascribed to that period. They are spacious (average size: 570sq. m), highly decorated two-story buildings and the rooms surround a central courtyard or several courtyards. They were built like a small fortress surrounded by a wall and the empty spaces between them served as alleys or piazzas. Most buildings on the western hill were residential; shops and

workshops were built near the northern gate, while public complexes were on the eastern quarter.

A Roman military necropolis dated to the time of Trajan and Hadrian was discovered east of the city. Two Latin inscriptions mention the burial of a centurion of the *Legio III Cyrenaica* and of an *eques* of *Cohors I Augusta Thracum* (Negev 1967a: 52–53; 1971a: 124 and see references therein).

**The Western Quarter.** Twenty-one houses were constructed on the western hill (Figures 3, 6). Insulae A and B included 9 and 3 structures, respectively. Three pairs (G, F, E) and three single structures (C, D, I), mostly residential (10 of 15), occupied the quarter. Structure D (Building I; Figure 8), dated to the Middle Roman period (2nd–3rd centuries AD), was identified as a palace with a reception hall and special decorative architectural elements (Negev 1988a: 66; 50–77). Structure F/2 (Building II) was an administrative center containing a tower, a courtyard, halls, and storage rooms (Negev 1988a: 77–78). Structure O/1 (Building XI) had an upper floor, stables, and a private shrine. It was partly destroyed in the second half of the 4th century AD, probably during the earthquake of AD 363, whereafter the western church was built (Negev 1988a: 88–109). Eastwards, Structure O/2



Figure 8. Mampsis, looking west (photo G. Fitoussi).

<sup>7</sup> Tali Erickson-Gini suggests that earthquake destruction in the late 1st or early 2nd century AD prompted a wave of construction at Mampsis

and Oboda (Erickson-Gini 2014: 100; Erickson-Gini and Tuttle 2017: 141).



(Building XIa) was probably constructed in the late 2nd or early 3rd century AD (Negev 1988a: 109–110). In Structure S (Building VIII), arches were constructed in a

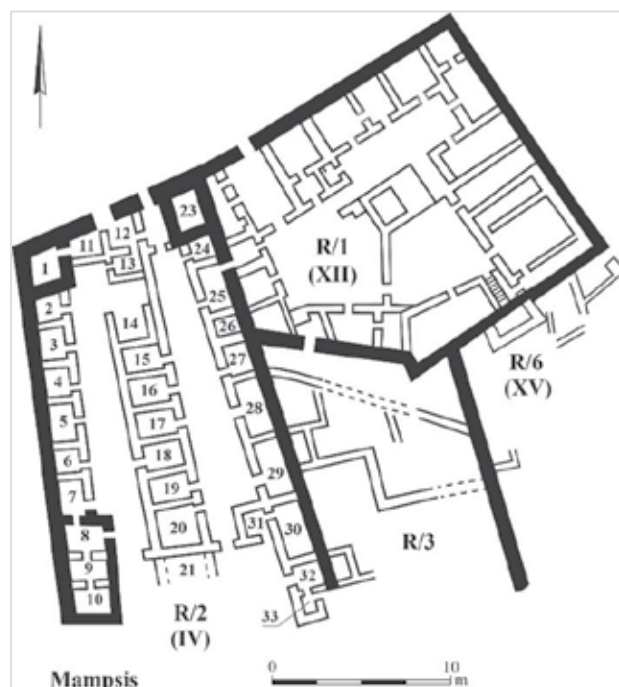


Figure 9. Plan of army camp and commander residency (O. Sion and D. Porotsky).

new direction during the 2nd half of the 3rd century AD. Structure A/5 (Building XVI), southeast of the northern city gate, was dated to the current period based on its masonry carving style. Structure F/1 (Building XVII) was identified as stores and workshops of the period along with three rooms in Structure C (Building XVIII), located northwest of Building I (Negev 1988a: 191–197). The so-called gymnasium (T; Building XXII), a one-story structure, has many rooms surrounding a court (Negev 1993: 246–261).

Following the survey, other structures were attributed to the current period (A/8, A/5, B/3, E/1, G/1, G/2, H, I, N/1), due to their dimensions, construction style and location (see Figure 6). Three small structures (A/6: 88sq. m; A/7: 84sq. m; F/3: 24sq. m), composed of 2–3 rooms were identified as stores or workshops. Two of them (A/6; A/7) are near the northern gate and the third (F/3) is in the northern fringes of Piazza 6.

**The Eastern Quarter.** The eastern quarter is located on the high ground which observes the city and its environment. Its complexes (R, P, Q) are of public nature. Insula P has two Middle Roman period structures (P/1, P/4), over which a bathhouse (P/3) and a pool (P/2) were built later.<sup>8</sup> Structure Q, attached to the city wall and excavated at its northern part, is 25m long and has rooms on its eastern and western sides with a courtyard in between. At the southern high ground of the hill are two



Figure 10. Commander residency (photo G. Fitoussi).

<sup>8</sup> Erickson-Gini proposes that the bathhouse and reservoir, together with the dams in Nahal Mamshit, were built by the Roman military in the Diocletianic period like those uncovered in Lejjun, Oboda, Meza

Hazeva, Bir Madkur, Gharandhal and Meza Yotvata (Erickson-Gini 2014: 99).



Figure 11. Stable's wall, looking east (photo O. Sion).

structures surrounded by a wall (R/1, R/2; Figures 9–10). The first was well preserved, while the other was destroyed in the 4th century AD, when the Eastern Church was erected. Negev assumed that Structure R/1 (Building XII) was the governor's house, while Structure R/2 (Building IV) was a market (Negev 1988a: 75–78).

Structure R/1 (Building XII; see Figure 9), the largest and most magnificent structure at the site (c. 1500sq. m), was constructed at the late 1st or 2nd century AD. It was entered from the north with protecting towers on both sides and has three sections (see Figure 10): the northern is a large, domestic two-story residential area with rooms adorned with mosaic floors, ornamented door posts, decorated arches posts and Nabatean capitals with ritual decorations, an inner court with wall paintings and a cistern (Negev 1988a: 146–147); in the west are service rooms; and in the southeast, stables. In its various sections the building has inner courts. Four strata were observed (Negev 1988a: 145–147): phase I, the beginning of the commercial activity, was dated by earliest coins from a hoard of 10,500 silver coins, from the years AD 98–137 to AD 222, hidden in a bronze jar under a staircase. The building was abandoned probably following a local epidemic, and the hidden coins jar, that indicates a wealthy owner, was never recovered. The coins, minted at northern Syria and Asia Minor, indicate a wide and rich trade network that dealt with Nabatean racehorses (Negev 1988a: 77). At phase II (c. AD 300), based on coins

retrieved from the stables (Figure 11) and a reuse of Tomb 108 in the Nabatean necropolis, the complex was re-inhabited in AD 300. In phase III, dated to the 1st half of the 4th century AD, various changes were observed in the complex and entrances between rooms were blocked; it might have been inhabited by the army in the era of Diocletian. In phase IV, the complex was inhabited by Christians, as crosses were carved over lintels and door posts and a surrounding wall was erected around the building, the Eastern Church and Building IV; Negev suggested (1988a: 146–147) that it might have served the bishop.

We propose that Structure R/1 (Building XII), adjacent to the army camp (see below), might have served the commander of the Roman garrison and its stables were probably used by the cavalry, one of which — Diogenes the son of Alexander of the *Cohors I Augusta Thracum* was buried in the Roman cemetery (Negev 1967b: 52, Pl. 9c). Fabian (2005: 219) suggested that the existence of the Roman cemetery indicates a military attendance which participated in roadbuilding.

Structure R/2 (Building IV; see Figure 9) has three rows of rooms running north–south along two streets; most of the floors in the rooms were made of beaten earth. Two entrances led to the building from the north and the rooms were entered from the streets with no entrances between them. The building, constructed over the remains of a watchtower of Mid-Nabatean period, was identified as a





Figure 12. Northern wall of army camp and commander residency (photo O. Sion).



Figure 13. Army camp: street, rooms row and barracks, looking south (photo O. Sion).

market (Negev 1988a: 163). Fabian (2005: 217) suggested to identify it as a military camp. We agree with his identification for the following reasons: its location on the highest place observing the road leading to the city; its plan resembling other military camps with long rows of rooms (Fabian 2005: 217, see references therein); and its wide external walls, build of large ashlars on the outer face with two corner watchtowers beside the entrance in the northern wall (1.5m wide; Figures 9: 1; 12; 13).

The military camp has a trapezoid plan (53m long, 25/36.5m wide). On its eastern side are six similar rooms (see Figure 9: 2–7). South of the watchtower are three wide, fortified rooms, presumably serving the watchtower and south of it is the southwestern entrance to the camp. The central row has six similar rooms (Figure 14: 15–20) with entrances in the east, apart from room 18, in which the entrance is in the west. Outstanding is room 14 that has benches along its walls (see Figure 13); its northern side is open to the western street, and it might have served as an

inner training area. The eastern rooms were well-preserved up to the northern wall of the Eastern Church. In the northern section, that is attached to Structure R/1, are two rooms (see Figure 9: 25, 26), a watchtower (see Figure 9: 23) and a narrow room in the south (2.6 × 2.35m; see Figure 9: 24). It would be reasonable to assume that they were guard rooms. The third room in the eastern row is unique and large (10.0 × 3.8m) and has a connection to the commander's residency at the northeastern corner. It has benches along its walls and might have been a reception room of the command office.

A bathhouse (P/3, Building V) was built north of the army camp and the commander residency. It has a Roman imperial plan with two connected units built on two levels. The upper holds an apodyterium, a frigidarium and a

tepidarium and the lower holds the partly subterranean furnaces and a caldarium. It was built above two structures of the Middle-Nabatean period (P/1, P/4) and was used during the Roman and Byzantine periods. Water was



Figure 14. Western church compound, looking north (photo G. Fitoussi).

supplied to the bath by pipes from the public pool (P/2; Building VII), which was built from ashlar, was plastered on the interior, and roofed by arches. The building was integrated with the city wall that was dated to c. AD 300 (Negev 1988a: 167–190).

#### **The Byzantine Period (4th– 6th centuries AD)**

In the Late Roman period during the reign of Diocletian, the city was surrounded by a wall, dated, based on coins revealed at its foundations and related architecture to around AD 300 (Negev 1988a: 64; 1988b: 9–29; Erickson-Gini 2010: 84–85).

In the 2nd half of the 4th century AD, two churches were constructed (see Figure 14; Negev 1988b: 30–63). Other structures were identified in three areas: five structures next to the city wall, west of Structure A/8, eighteen in the central quarter between the eastern and western hills (Insulae L, M, see below) and several others (B/1, B/2, O/4, O/5, O/6, O/7, Q, T) next to the city wall. The average dimension of each structure is about 350sq. m.

**The Central Quarter.** Eighteen structures were observed in two insulae (L, M) at the central quarter, and in the ravine between both hills, out of which 5 and 8 structures (respectively) were identified. Most of these structures are domestic and they are relatively small and rather poorly built. Larger structures (L/1 – 925sq. m; L/2 – 750sq. m) have spacious rooms and their plan and location next to the city gate may indicate that they were storage facilities. Outstanding is Structure J, which is poorly built and Structure N/22, which is rather small (320sq. m).

An estimate of the number of inhabitants at Mampsis during the late 5th and early 6th century AD is based upon the size of the built area within the wall (24540sq. m) and

the number of structures (56, of which 43 are domestic buildings). Broshi and Finkelstein (1990:4) estimated that 25 persons per dunam sums up with 1135 persons (see also Shor 1988: 252). Safrai (1995: 287–289) surveyed several sites and estimated 30–35 persons per dunam, which sums to 1239–1445. Shershevsky estimated between 1060–1500 inhabitants for Mampsis. Hence, we can assume 1000–1500 inhabitants in Mampsis. According to Avraham Negev, based on numismatic data, the end of Mampsis occurred during Justinian's reign, when the northern city gate was burned.<sup>9</sup>

As *limitanei*, the existence of Mampsis was based on the *annona militaris*. When the regular pavement to the *limitanei* was discontinued by Justinian during the 2nd quarter of the 6th century AD, the compact and isolated city may not have been able to thrive on the agricultural production alone. When the regular payment to the neighboring Saracen tribes ceased, the city was possibly attacked, and the gate was burnt.

#### **Discussion**

The updated city plan adds significant data on the location and identification of the city's structures throughout its history. Based on the survey results, we have reevaluated the interpretations of past excavations concerning the relationship between the city's urban territory and its agricultural land, the identity of its population and their livelihood.

The rich finds from the two burial grounds, a civilian Nabatean cemetery and a Roman military cemetery, provide important information on the identity of the city's inhabitants and their livelihoods (Negev 1969; 1971a; 1977: 150–154). Two Latin inscriptions from the military

<sup>9</sup> However, later excavations by Erickson-Gini in the courtyard entrance of Building XII revealed ceramic evidence dated to the 2nd half of the 6th and the early 7th centuries AD (Erickson-Gini 1999b: 101; Figs.

17: 6; 18: 5; 21: 3). Subsequent excavations in Building III between 2017–2020 substantiate the presence of ceramic wares beyond the mid-sixth century AD (Erickson-Gini pers. comm. 9.9.21).



cemetery, dated to Trajan and Hadrian eras (Negev 1967b: 52–53), identify two of the burials: a *Legio* III centurion and an *eques* of the *Cohors* I (Negev 1971a: 124). Twenty-seven seal impressions from Tomb 107 in the Nabatean cemetery depict gods, symbols, inscriptions, and stamps of three other cities of the *Provincia Arabia*: Petra—the Metropolis, Characmoba (Carákmwba) and Rabbatmoab (Rabbáqmoab)—two secondary administrative centers. These finds attest to a connection between Mampsis and these cities, and perhaps between the Roman garrisons stationed in each one of them. The identification of the military camp in Structure R/2 and the commander residency in Structure R/1 also point to a military attendance at Mampsis in the Middle Roman period.

During the Byzantine period, structures were built in a new, central quarter, while the residential buildings remained on the western quarter, and the public buildings on the eastern one. Two churches were erected—the main one was situated in the eastern quarter. The bricks exposed in Structure M/8 indicate that this building may have been used as a small bathhouse.

The agricultural hinterland, consisting of 300 dunams and possibly another 300 dunams upstream, is rather small when compared with other settlements in the Negev.<sup>10</sup> Though highly sophisticated (Sion and Israeli 2001: 69–75), it seems insufficient for the city's needs. The city's financial sustenance was thus based upon payments given by the authorities to the *limitanei* for their military service (Negev 1990: 346), a conclusion based on the sums of money specified in the Nessana Papyrus 39, dated by Kraemer (1958: 119–125) to the mid-sixth-century AD. The document has two parts; first part records eight settlements belonging to three different geographical units: Mount Hebron (Carmola and Shubaile), Be'er Sheva' Valley (Be'er Sheva', Malaatha) and the Negev Highlands (Elusa, Nessana, Oboda and Mampsis). Next to the names of the settlements were listed the sums that were paid. Kraemer assumed that the papyrus represents a tax list, while Negev suggested (1988b: 5) that the *solidi* mentioned are payments from the authorities of *Palestina* to the soldiers of Mampsis (Negev 1990: 347).

The military post is mentioned in Nessana Papyrus 36, along with various payments to military personnel. The sums equal those in Nessana Papyrus 39 and may represent their distribution. Negev assumed that suitable men, about 250 out of the 1500 persons in Mampsis, served in the Byzantine army and that their salaries were the city's main source of income in that period. During the 6th century AD, an *Ilirian Dalmaty* unit was stationed at Mampsis (Negev 1969: 235–238); it seems, therefore, that the stables of R/1 (Building XII) and O/1 (Building XI) served the cavalry unit.

The northern city gate of Mampsis, with its evidence of destruction, revealed hundreds of coins of Arcadius (AD 383–408) and one coin of Justin I (AD 518–527). In the northwestern wall's watchtower, c. 20 coins of the 6th

century AD were revealed. Consequently, Negev dated the destruction of Mampsis to the 6th century AD, about a hundred years earlier than the destruction of Oboda and about two hundred years earlier than other Negev settlements. What then was the reason, for this early destruction of Mampsis?

*The Novels of Saint Theodosius*, issued on September 12, 443, describe the efforts of the authorities to protect the borders in the east from the Saracens and other nomadic tribes. Special attention was given to the protection of the *limitanei* salaries and the fields that they cultivated (Negev 1969: 249). In view of the results of the present survey and past excavations, it can be assumed that government support to the region was the fundamental basis of the wealth of Mampsis from the 2nd century AD onward. The evidence given by Procopius of Caesarea, the historian of Justinian, sheds some light on the date of the military troop's dispersion, probably after AD 532 (Negev 1990: 353, see n.60). Once this support ceased, and no money was available to pay the Saracens off, they invaded Mampsis and burned down the main gate.

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<sup>10</sup> H. Sa'don has 1125 acres (Sion, Erickson-Ginai and Rubin 2019), Rehovot-in-the Negev has 625 acres.



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# Landscapes as Palimpsest: The ‘Ancient Lands’ Myth and the Evolution of Agricultural Landscapes in the Southern Levant in Late Antiquity

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*Thousands of photographs, scattered in archives across the globe, depict the countryside landscapes of Syria – Palestine since the middle of the 19th century. In addition, aerial photography in the Near East, much developed since WWI, became a useful tool for archaeologists, providing new angles for evaluating the location and distribution of ancient sites and their surrounding agricultural or steppe landscapes. These landscapes were usually reflected in the eyes and minds of early travellers and explorers as representing the authentic ‘Biblical’ or ‘New Testament’ sceneries. Modern scholarship has occasionally adopted this approach, linking the traditional agricultural landscapes of the 19th and early 20th centuries to remains of settlements from Roman and Byzantine periods. In a sharp contrast, recent archaeological research of terraced fields produced a more reliable chronology for the development of the ancient agricultural landscapes. This paper address both sources – the photographic archives and the new archaeological data, as tools for reconstructing the development of agricultural landscapes in the southern Levant from Roman to late Medieval times. The detailed studies of terraced landscapes in the Negev Highlands and the Jerusalem area will form the basis for this discussion, with additional data from other regions in Syria- Palestine.*

**KEYWORDS:** PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES; AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES; TERRACES; NEGEV HIGHLANDS; ‘ARABAH VALLEY; JUDAEAN HILLS; JORDAN VALLEY.

## Introduction

The study of ancient agricultural systems in their context has been for many years a neglected field in the archaeological research of the Near East. As a rule, scholars were more interested in the excavation of monumental remains in cities and villages, exposing public and religious buildings that dominated the local landscape. Thus, despite the extensive research conducted in many regions, archaeologists dedicated little attention to the study of agricultural fields, their accurate dating, and their environmental context.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, agricultural systems and their related water management installations are highly visible around the Mediterranean basin, as well as in the steppe zones of the southern Levant and North Africa, where man-made terraced fields dominate the landscape. In some regions it has been estimated that terraced fields covered more than half of the countryside, dramatically extending the agriculture potential.<sup>2</sup>

The tentative dating of these man-made agricultural environments associated them to the so called ‘glorious periods’ of the past, mainly from the Hellenistic to Late Antique times. This perception of the ‘ancient lands’ was very much enhanced by thousands of early photographs from the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century AD, which depicted the traditional landscapes of Syria-Palestine in the late Ottoman period. The connection between these landscapes and the old ‘Biblical’, Roman, and Late Antique sceneries prevailed in many scholarly studies up the end of the 20th century.

The recent development of dating technologies, which address the accumulation of soils within the ancient fields

and not the proximity of fields to nearby settlements from a given period, provide the basis for a revised view on the evolution of agricultural landscapes in the southern Levant, challenging the previous assumptions that were rooted in this ‘Ancient Lands’ myth, which was created in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This paper discusses the contribution and limitation of the photographic archives to the reconstruction of ancient agricultural landscapes and will present the new approach for dating ancient agricultural fields in their settings.

## Photographic Archives and the Reconstruction of the ‘Ancient Lands’

On the sunny winter day of 3 December 1917, at 1:45 PM, an air man of the Bavarian Air Squadron 304, flying over the main Jerusalem – Jaffa Road, took pictures of the area west of Jerusalem, between the villages of Qaluniah and Abu Gosh, as part of the German intelligence mission during WWI (Figure 1). The striking barren landscape, much different than the current one dominated by extensive modern construction and wooded areas, displays distinctive evidence of massive hillslope terraced agriculture (Figure 2). The parallel lines extending along the slopes are the visible evidence of man-made terraces, produced by the local rural population in the hinterland of Jerusalem throughout hundreds of years.

Earlier on the same day, 3 December 1917, the Air Squadron 302 was operating in the region of Ramla, in central Palestine. The German pilots took several detailed aerial photographs of the small Ottoman town and its surroundings (Figure 3). Around the town one can see many agricultural plots and orchards encircled by stone

<sup>1</sup> For a thematic discussion, see Bradford 1957; Gadot *et al.* 2016: 397–399; Gadot *et al.* 2018; Gibson 1995: 295–298, for updated summaries.

<sup>2</sup> For a summary of quantitative estimates in the Mediterranean, see Horden and Purcell 2000: 234–237.





Figure 1. Aerial view of Landscape west of Jerusalem, December 3rd, 1917.



Figure 2. Judean Hills terraces in the 1940s (Reifenberg 1955).

fences, some of them facing roads and trails leading to the town from its hinterland.<sup>3</sup> The early aerial photographs of Ramla provided the basis for the reconstruction of the layout and agricultural hinterland of the town. Part of this work was based on a careful re-evaluation of the Ottoman town and its surrounding fields and plantations, which as

in palimpsest, covered the remains of the Early Islamic city. The layout and main thoroughfares of the ancient city were still visible in the late Ottoman landscape as depicted from the air by the WWI German pilots (Avni 2014: 159–188; Kedar 2008; Shmueli and Goldfus 2016). The images provided a useful tool for the study of the development of agricultural landscapes through the ages. The information provided by the early aerial photographs enables the evaluation of fields and their settlement context in the 19th and early 20th centuries, in comparison to earlier periods (Gadot *et al.* 2016, 2018).

Hundreds of pictures were taken in many flights conducted by British, German, and French pilots in WWI and in the 1920s and 1930s. Aerial photography of sites and regions was initiated by the German air force and by the British Royal Air Force in WWI, with flights over Palestine, Jordan and Syria conducted for intelligence purposes. It continued in the 1920s by British pilots of the Royal Air Mail Service who flew over the Syrian, Arabian and Iraqi deserts.<sup>4</sup> One of the most extensive collections of photographs was provided by the French Jesuit priest and pilot Antoine Poidebard, who for eight years (1926–1934) documented hundreds of sites and features in the Syrian and Jordanian deserts (Poidebard 1934).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> These pictures are part of a larger collection produced by pilots and photographers of the German air force, and later deposited in several small archives in southern Germany, see Kedar 1999: 12.

<sup>4</sup> Among the new features identified were the so called ‘Desert Kites’, and other prehistoric structures, see for a recent review Kennedy *et al.* 2015.

<sup>5</sup> For a map of sites documented in Syria and Iraq, see Riley 1987: 13; For a detailed description, see Deuel 1969: 83–109; For a recent evaluation, see Helbig 2016: 283–300. Inspired by the works of Poidebard, the Oriental Institute in Chicago sponsored a similar venture of air photography in the Iranian plateau, carried out by Erich F. Schmidt, a German-born orientalist. His flights above Iran, which also





Figure 3. Aerial view of Ramla, December 3rd, 1917.

Many of the monumental structures that he interpreted as Roman frontier fortifications were later dated to the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. The re-evaluation of Poidebard's photographs presents a detailed depiction of the landscape of the Syrian desert, documenting impressive ancient sites, steppe agricultural landscapes, some of them later obliterated or destroyed. Yet Poidebard's conclusions also portray the early 20th century colonial approach, which is manifested in the immediate interpretation of any impressive structure as representing the glorious Roman past. Consequently, the French Mandate rule in Syria (and in North Africa as well), marked the Roman presence in the East as a source of identification and imitation.<sup>6</sup>

The early aerial photographs provided a valuable source for the reconstruction of specific sites and the landscapes

in the countryside. The importance of this documentation is particularly significant considering the extensive modern development in the Near East in the last fifty years, causing the destruction of many sites and traditional landscapes. It is further emphasized in the last decade, with the brutal destruction and massive looting of sites caused by the civil war and the hostilities in Syria and Iraq.

The vast number of aerial photographs incorporates with an even larger number of scenery pictures taken in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Particularly famous photographers as Maison Bonfils, Tancrede Dumas, and those of the American Colony in Jerusalem, produced thousands of pictures that documented monuments, landscapes, and daily life scenes of the local population. These photographs are concentrated today in several major archives around the globe, such as the Matson Collection

included some surface work, provided many new finds, see Schmidt 1940.

<sup>6</sup> A typical example of this view of the European scholars, who attributed the monumental remains of the Syrian desert to the glorious past of the Roman period is particularly evident in the history of research at Qasr Heir al-Gharbi and the large dam nearby. For Poidebard, this monumental dam and its extensive agricultural system was a solid proof of the traces left by a 'great Occidental civilization'. It was an 'instructive trace which reveals the organizational genius of Rome and the natural riches of the desert ready to come alive again' (Helbig

2016: 285–286). He formed a terminological continuity between the Roman era and the French Mandate period. Both were portrayed as a civilizing achievement, primarily a scientific-technological in character, in contrast to the Islamic inferior cultures (Helbig 2016: 297). Yet, the excavations conducted at the site few years later (1938) showed that this desert fortress was in fact from the Early Islamic period: The 'Roman' castellum turned out to be a lavishly appointed Umayyad palace.



*Figure 4. Rural landscape south of Bethlehem c. 1940.*

in the Library of Congress, the Palestine Exploration Fund, the École Biblique in Jerusalem, and in many private collections.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the pictures reflected the sceneries along the routes to the Holy Land and the famous sites connected to Christian tradition. Yet some of them provided reliable evidence for the traditional agricultural practices that prevailed in the Near East in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Sceneries of the countryside, where farmers cultivated lands, were among the favourites, mainly because they reflected, in the travellers' minds, the 'Biblical Lands' as preserved in the traditional agricultural and nomadic practices (Figures 4-5). This perception connected the local Arabs with the alleged Biblical and New Testament surroundings, thus creating, or perhaps imagining, an 'ancient lands' myth, in which the practices of the local Fellahin or Bedouin reflected those prevailing in Roman times. For example, typical agricultural landscapes outside Bethlehem, in which local Fellahin cultivated terraced fields (see Figure 4), were perceived as representing the landscapes of the Roman period; watch towers surrounded by terraced fields in the Samaria Hills (see Figure 5) were presented as authentic remains of Biblical times. Modern scholarship, particularly in the discipline that was known as 'Biblical Archaeology', adopted this approach. Many scholars working in the Levant connected the traditional terraced fields visible in



*Figure 5. Agricultural field and watching tower, Samaria Hills c. 1890 (Library of Congress – Matson collection).*

<sup>7</sup> See for example, Cobbin and Jacobson 2005; Hallote *et al.* 2012; Nir 1987.

the landscape of the early 20th century to nearby sites from the Iron Age, Roman and Byzantine periods, relying mainly on their association to dated residential sites from these periods (see discussion below).

Several questions are put forward using the photographic archives as a tool in reconstructing the ancient landscapes: Is there a continuity of traditional landscapes between the Roman - Byzantine periods and the Ottoman period? How can we decipher the changes between the 4th and the 19th centuries? Can we compare the traditional agricultural practices of the 19th century to those of 'Biblical', New Testament or Late Antique practices?

### New Approaches in the Study of Ancient Landscapes

A major leap forward in the study and dating of ancient agricultural fields was made in the past three decades, with several regional projects that emphasized the systematic study of fields in their rural context. Most of these studies connected the rise and decline of agricultural exploitation of the countryside with the intensification and abatement of nearby settlements. The common paradigm, which had been adopted in many regions around the Mediterranean, suggested that the rise of agricultural regimes began in the Hellenistic period with the mass expansion of settlements around the Mediterranean, and was further intensified in the Roman and Byzantine periods.<sup>8</sup> The establishment of new cities and the development of vast hinterlands around them expanded the cultivated areas in the countryside, with penetration of rural zones into the steppe areas of the Negev, Jordan and the Syrian desert. It was believed that these settlements declined in the 7th century, when the Sasanian and Arab conquests marked the collapse of the extensive agricultural systems in the Near East.

Consequently, the intensive construction of terraced fields has been connected in various regions, such as the Syrian Massif and North Africa, with the expansion of settlements. The peak of agricultural expansion was dated either to the early Roman period, or to the 5th and 6th centuries.<sup>9</sup> The regional studies conducted in the Samarian Hills, for example, associated fields to nearby settlements from the Roman and Byzantine periods (Dar 1986). A similar methodology was adopted in the Negev Highlands, where the fields were first dated to the Nabataean period and later associated with the extensive settlements of the Byzantine period (Mayerson 1960; Rubin 1990). However, recent archaeological research, which showed increasing evidence for settlement continuity into the Early Islamic period,<sup>10</sup> also calls for a re-evaluation of the traditional dating of agricultural fields and related irrigation systems, looking at aspects of continuity of previous traditions, together with the penetration of new agricultural technologies.

Several recent studies addressed the question of terraced fields and the chronology of their use, adopting the Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating methodology. The results of these studies enable a refined reconstruction of the duration of agricultural exploitation of specific areas. In contrast to radiocarbon dating of organic materials, OSL dates minerals. This method measures the time elapsed since the last exposure of mineral grains to sunlight. It uses quartz grains as dosimeters, recording the accumulation of environmental radiation over time. A signal accumulates within the quartz as a result of the ionizing radiation. When exposed to sunlight, this signal is reset to zero, and following the covering of soils deposits the signal builds up again and its intensity is proportional to the time spanned since the covering. This signal can be measured in the laboratory and converted into a 'burial age' (Aitken 1998; Avni *et al.* 2013: 333–335; Wintle 2008).<sup>11</sup>

With the intensification of archaeological research of Roman through Early Islamic settlement, the relevance of agricultural regimes became imperative to the reconstruction of a comprehensive picture of settlement and society. Several studies focused on the chronology and mode of operation of ancient agricultural fields, both by independent dating through OSL, and by relating them to their immediate settlement context. These studies provided, for the first time, a reliable chronology for the development of agricultural landscapes in the southern Levant, both in the desert and steppe areas and in the Mediterranean ecosystems.

### Agricultural Landscapes in Steppe and Desert Areas: The Negev Highlands, 'Arabah Valley and Southern Jordan as Case Studies

Ancient agricultural systems in the Negev Highlands cover more than 30,000 hectares of cultivated plots dammed with stone-built terraces, alongside extensive channels designed for collecting run-off water from hillslopes and from occasional intensive floods in wadis. The vast areas of ancient agriculture in the Negev impressed the early travelers and researchers of this area, who pointed out that such an intensive work must be connected to the Roman and Byzantine spread of settlements into this area (Palmer 1870; Woolley and Lawrence 1914). With the development of modern research in this region the early beginnings of ancient agriculture in the Negev were dated by some scholars to the Bronze and Iron Ages, and their vast expansion to the Nabataean - Roman period (Aharoni *et al.* 1960; Even Ari *et al.* 1982: 100–111; Keidar 1967; Negev 1986). The extensive documentation by aerial photography of large areas in the Negev during the 1950s and 1960s emphasized the vast distribution of the ancient fields (Figures 6-7). The thorough study of these aerial photographs, which led to extensive field surveys,

<sup>8</sup> For the intensification of urban settlement in the Hellenistic period, see Olus *et al.* 2016.

<sup>9</sup> See for example, North Africa, Barker *et al.* 1996; For the Judaean Lowlands, see Dagan 2010, 2011; For the Samarian Hills, see Dar 1986; For Syria- Palestine, see Decker 2009; For the Negev, see Mayerson 1960; Rubin 1990; For the Judaean Hills, see Ron 1966;

Seligman 2011; For Northern Syria, see Tchalenko 1953–58; Tate 1992; For the Near East in general, see Wilkinson 2003.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Magness 2003; Walmsley 2007 and Avni 2014.

<sup>11</sup> This methodology has been used in several archaeological and geomorphological studies in the last decade. For updated summaries, see Gadot *et al.* 2018.





*Figure 6. Aerial view of Negev Highland ancient fields.*



*Figure 7. Reconstructed farm in the Negev Highlands.*

presented their vast regional distribution, showing that the ancient fields covered most of the valleys in the rocky desert areas of the Negev Highlands (Even Ari *et al.* 1982; Keidar 1967; Rubin 1990). Based on the presence of nearby Nabataean settlements it has been suggested that

the political changes of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD triggered the massive development of agriculture in this desert region (Negev 1986). However, additional surveys and excavations revised this chronology, showing that the zenith of agricultural expansion correlates with the

intensification of settlements in the Byzantine period (Decker 2009; Rubin 1990). The involvement of the central government in the creation and expansion of the settlements and the possible impact of climatic fluctuations had influenced the settlement processes in the region.<sup>12</sup> The time of demise and collapse of the settlements and the adjacent fields is debated. While previous studies established it with the Arab conquest of 634–640 (e.g., Negev 1986), recent research concluded that settlements declined and were abandoned much later in the Early Islamic period (Avni 2008, 2014).

The chronological framework of agricultural terraced fields in six sites in the Negev Highlands was established by combining archaeological and geomorphologic analysis with OSL samplings, addressing the establishment and demise of the agricultural systems within the local cultural and political milieu of the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods (Avni *et al.* 2013). This research presented a clear chronological pattern: the fields were constructed not earlier than the 3rd or 4th century and they were used continuously until the 10th and 11th centuries (but see Tepper *et al.* 2020 for a different approach). The development of the agricultural regime in the Negev Highlands with its sophisticated terraced field and water collecting system seems to have been a gradual process which was established independently in different regions, rather than the outcome of a governmental enterprise carried out within a short time. As in other Mediterranean agrarian societies, the growth and expansion of agriculture was connected to economic mechanisms (Erickson-Gini 2010; Rubin 1990: 163–180).<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the accurate dating of agricultural systems show that the cultivation, maintenance, and accumulation of loess soil in the fields continued in the Early Islamic period. The interrelation of chronology between the fields and nearby settlements shows that while most of the fields continued to be in use, the chronology of settlements is more variable: The large Byzantine settlements in the eastern Negev Highlands, Avdat and Mamshit, declined shortly after the Arab conquest, while in the western settlements of Shivta and Nessana, habitation continued until the 10th century (Avni 2008).<sup>14</sup> Recent studies at Elusa, the largest city of the Negev, show that the city declined already in the second half of the 6th century (Bar-Oz *et al.* 2019, Schone *et al.* 2019).

The agricultural settlements of the 'Arabah Valley are fundamentally different from the ones in the Negev Highlands, both in their chronology and in the mode of operation. While the Negev Highlands show a clear pattern of continuity between the Byzantine and the Early Islamic periods, the 'Arabah had witnessed a new type of settlements, introduced in the 8th century, and characterized by new architectural and technological

elements (Avner and Magness 1998; Avni 2018; Porath 1995, 2016; Whitcomb 1994, 2006). The 'Arabah sites consisted of two main types: small villages which contained clusters of simple rectangular buildings, and farmsteads which included a residential area surrounded by intensive agricultural fields. The irrigation of the fields was based on the direct supply of water from ground aquifers through *qanats* – underground tunnels that transferred water from aquifers to agricultural fields in steppe and desert regions. The introduction of *qanats*, some of them several km long, into the region, extended the arable lands and enabled the expansion of agricultural settlements (Avni 2018; Porath 2016).

The 'Arabah Valley settlements provide a unique example that emphasizes the penetration of new agricultural technologies into the region following the Arab conquest. The farmsteads in the hinterland of Ayla were established *ex-nihilo*, in an area that was not inhabited in the Byzantine period. The new settlers utilized *qanats* to divert underground water and extend dramatically the arable areas in this extremely arid zone. The mass introduction of *qanats* into the region and their unequivocal archaeological dating show that this area flourished under the new Islamic rule. Interestingly, the creation of new settlements in the 'Arabah did not affect the continuity of agricultural settlement in the Negev Highlands, which continued to flourish as in the Byzantine period.

Unlike the clear separation between settlements and agriculture systems in the Negev Highlands and the Arabah Valley, in southern Jordan old and new systems functioned side by side and enriched each other. In Humayma, for example, a continuity of farming can be traced between the Byzantine and the Early Islamic periods, when the Christian settlement was converted into a wealthy Early Islamic residence. The extensive agricultural fields around Humayma functioned in both periods, and historical sources mention that the Abbasid settlers planted an olive grove of about 500 trees at the site (Foote 2007; Oleson 2010; Oleson and Schick 2013). Other agricultural fields in southern Jordan show continuity of use from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic periods, for example at Wadi Feinan, Jebel Haroun and the Petra region. The agricultural system around Petra was dated to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD (Lavento *et al.* 2007). However, this chronology was based on 'circumstantial evidence', meaning their relation to nearby

dated sites and the pottery found within the fields, rather than on the independent dating of soil deposits. The flourishing agriculture regime in southern Jordan is well-attested in the Petra papyri from the 6th century (Frösen 2004), and it seems that, similar to the Negev Highlands, its large-scale development was the outcome of intensive settlement during the Byzantine period (Nasarat *et al.*

<sup>12</sup> A climatic determinism as a central agent influencing settlement processes in the Near East was proposed already in the early 20th century by Huntington (1911), and in further developed recent studies (e.g., Issar 1998; Issar and Zohar 2004), but rejected by most

archaeologists working in the Negev. e.g., Rubin 1989; and see the discussion in Avni 1996: 67–71; 2014: 329–331.

<sup>13</sup> For the international trade in wine from the Negev and southern Palestine, see McCormick 2012. For the growth and decline of the Negev wine industries, see Fuks *et al.* 2021.

<sup>14</sup> For a tentative new chronology in Shivta, see Tepper *et al.* 2015, 2018.



2012). As in the Negev, recent OSL and radiocarbon dating of agricultural systems in the Petra region shows continuity to the 9th and 10th centuries (Beckers *et al.* 2013).

### The Mediterranean Landscapes:

#### The Judaeen Hills and Jordan Valley as Case Studies

Agricultural hillside terraces cover large areas of the Judaeen Hills. They were traditionally dated from Hellenistic to Byzantine times, with possible earlier beginnings in the Bronze and Iron ages (Edelstein and Milevski 1994; Gibson 2001, 2015; Gibson and Edelstein 1985). The zenith of hillside terracing and valley cultivation was connected to the massive expansion of settlements during the Roman and Byzantine periods. However, this chronology was refuted with the first systematic dating of terraces based on OSL samples, conducted at Ramat Rahel, south of Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup> The settlement's main periods of habitation span between the 8th century BC and the 10th century AD. It consisted of a palatial complex in the Iron Age and Persian periods, which was transformed into a village in the Roman period and functioned as one of the rural settlements around Jerusalem. The village was abandoned in the 11th century, but this area continued to serve as the 'food basket' of Jerusalem in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods. The immediate surroundings of Ramat Rahel consist of hillside terraces and agricultural installations. Several stages of terrace construction were identified and dated by OSL

samples, showing three main periods of use: the first between the 6th and 9th centuries, the second intermediate phase was dated to the 12th – 13th centuries; and the youngest and most extensive terracing was formed in the early Ottoman period (Davidovich *et al.* 2012).

With these results from Ramat Rahel, the research on terraced fields was extended to a number of sites in the Judaeen hills west of Jerusalem.<sup>16</sup> The extensive terracing at these sites was dated by OSL to the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, with no evidence for significant terrace construction in the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods (Gadot *et al.* 2016, 2018). (Figure 8) These finds contradict the results of excavations in nearby settlements, in which habitation stages from Roman through Early Islamic periods were documented.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, it seems that most of the terraced areas which predominated the landscape in the 19th and early 20th century as shown by the detailed aerial photographs, are the product of an intensive terracing of the slopes and valleys which took place between the 14th and 16th centuries. Contrary to the previous perception of the 'ancient lands', it does not reflect the landscape of the Roman and Byzantine times.

The picture of continuity and innovation of agricultural landscapes is much clearer in the Jordan Valley, between Jericho in the south and Beth She'an in the north. While this area was a marginal region during the Byzantine period, habitation was much intensified in Early Islamic times. The construction of several large estates north of



Figure 8. Ramat Rahel terraces.

<sup>15</sup> For a preliminary summary of the excavations, see Lipschits *et al.* 2011; For the research in terraces, see Davidovich *et al.* 2012.

<sup>16</sup> This research is headed by Yuval Gadot from Tel Aviv University, see Gadot *et al.* 2016, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> For the Judaeen Hills, see Adawi 2010; For the Judaeen Lowlands, the result from terraced fields calls for further research on the nature of agricultural exploitation in these areas during Byzantine and Islamic times, see Dagan 2010, 2011; For an updated summary, see Avni 2014: 145–157, 249–257.



Jericho, and particularly the palatial complex in Khirbet al-Mafjar, attests to the affluence of the Jericho region in Early Islamic times.<sup>18</sup> As in the 'Arabah Valley, new irrigation techniques were introduced into the Jordan Valley, including the intensive use of *qanats*. Several *qanat* systems were documented in this region, all of them connected to settlements from the Early Islamic period, located within an extensive network of farmsteads and agricultural fields (Peled 2009; Porath 1985: 31–44).

### Discussion: Continuity, Innovation and Decline in Terraced Fields

Man-made terraced fields are a prominent landmark in the Mediterranean basin landscape. In some regions they cover up to 60% of the hillslopes and valleys (Reifenberg 1955: 47; Ron 1966; Seligman 2011: 326–331). The dating of these fields was so far been based on circumstantial evidence from nearby settlements, and not on finds from the fields themselves. The different styles of construction, the pottery sherds found in accumulated soil of the terraces, and even the Carbon 14 dates obtained proved to be unreliable for dating, as these sediments were probably driven from other locations and repositioned in secondary contexts.<sup>19</sup>

The updated study of terraced fields addresses the efforts invested in construction and their duration of use. This issue should be viewed considering the outstanding investment of labor and the capabilities of local populations to construct thousands of miles of stone walls, transferring hitherto uncultivated areas into a terraced landscape. A rough estimation conducted in several Mediterranean surroundings, particularly in Greece and southern France, concluded that a group of twenty to fifty experienced workers could construct terraces covering about six sq km within eight to twenty years, a surprisingly short time (Horden and Purcell 2000: 234–236).

As terraced fields are a widespread feature in traditional agrarian societies, the question of accurate dating of fields and their relation to nearby settlements has been of crucial significance for the reconstruction of settlement intensification and demise (e.g., Marcus and Stanish 2006). While numerous studies addressed these topics regarding the settled areas of the Mediterranean basin, only few targeted the arid fringe zones, in which runoff desert agriculture was practiced, and almost none considered the adoption of independent accurate dating methodologies (e.g., Barker *et al.* 1996; Dar 1986). Our research on agricultural terraces in the Negev suggested a different approach using OSL as the major dating tool (Avni *et al.* 2012, 2013, 2019). The unequivocal results indicate that the massive construction of terraced fields in the Negev Highlands began around the 4th century AD, and the agricultural regime functioned in most sites until the 10th or early 11th centuries (Avni *et al.* 2013: 340–341). A similar chronology was recently obtained in southern

Jordan, dating the duration of use of terraced fields spanned from Roman times to the 9th and 10th centuries (Beckers *et al.* 2013). The results from the Judaean hills are less definite. The terraces at Ramat Rahel were cultivated between the 6th and 9th centuries (Davidovich *et al.* 2012), while farther west, at Har Eitan, the most extensive use of terraces occurred in the Mamluk and early Ottoman periods (Gadot *et al.* 2016.).<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the shifting stages of soil erosion and deposition in terraces of this area might have obliterated the evidence from the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods.

The establishment of a reliable chronological framework for the ancient agricultural fields contributed to a better understanding of the circumstances of their installation, use, and abatement. The massive construction of terraces, the building of solid dams and diversion channels, and the maintenance of the fields which involved the repair and constant raise of terraces and the cleaning of water conduits from loess deposits, was a Sisyphean and time-consuming endeavor, which required a continuous investment of resources and manpower. Nevertheless, the evaluation of the runoff desert agriculture of the Negev and the hillslope terraced agriculture in the Mediterranean areas shows that such work was within the capabilities of the local population. It seems that the on-going terrace construction, from the collection of stones to the skilled construction of supporting walls, was conducted in the family or village level. The maintenance duties in keeping the fields functional and preventing uncontrolled erosion and sedimentation was part of their routine work, particularly following intensive floods. In the Mediterranean regions the terraces were associated with local villages, and their construction and maintenance were conducted by the local population who cultivated small, family-based plots (Gibson 1995; Horden and Purcell 2000: 234–297). The gradual construction of agricultural terraces suggest that this was a 'bottom-up' process initiated in the family and the village level, rather than a state sponsored initiative.

To conclude, it seems that two geographically distinguished patterns emerge from this evaluation of the continuity, innovation and change in agricultural systems and fields: a continuity of terraced fields in the Jerusalem region and the Negev Highlands, as well as in southern Jordan, and the introduction of new water management technologies and irrigation practices in the 'Arabah and Jordan Valleys. The sharp decline of agricultural regimes throughout these regions occurred in the 10th and 11th centuries. This chronology corresponds with the recently acknowledged picture of dramatic demise of the settlements in Palestine, Jordan, Egypt and perhaps elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean during the 2nd half of the 11th century, probably resulted by the combined effects of political instability and environmental pressures.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed archaeological description of the Jericho area, see Jennings 2015.

<sup>19</sup> See discussions in Avni *et al.* 2013; Davidovitch *et al.* 2012.

<sup>20</sup> For criticism and a different approach for the dating of terraced fields in the Judaean Hills, see Gibson 2015.

<sup>21</sup> For early Islamic Palestine, see Avni 2014; For the Eastern Mediterranean in General, see Ellenblum 2012.

## Conclusions – Photographic Archives, Archaeology, and the Reconstruction of Ancient Agricultural Landscapes

In the light of the new dating framework for the development and change in the agricultural landscapes, the large archival corpuses of early aerial and landscape photography of Syria- Palestine are viewed in their new, perhaps more real, dimensions. The traditional romantic approach, which connected anthropogenic agricultural landscapes to periods of prosperity in the archaeological record, mainly the Hellenistic, Roman and Late Antique periods, is challenged by the new accurate dating of terraced fields. The value of the photographic archives as a reliable source for the reconstruction of traditional landscapes is not diminished by the new studies, but rather put into more reliable context. There is little doubt that these photographs provide a valuable source for the reconstruction of the local landscapes in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, as the OSL dating of terraces in the Jerusalem areas show. The incorporation of the data retrieved from early aerial and land photographs with the new measurable dating methodologies of agricultural fields provides new opportunities for this interdisciplinary research. While the 'one picture is better than a thousand words' paradigm could apply in many regional studies, the use of early photography as representing a given period should be tested in the light of other research methodologies.

It seems that the value of this excellent documentation of the 19th and early 20th century agricultural landscapes lies both in giving an unequivocal picture of the late Ottoman agricultural and pastoral surroundings, which were later deleted by modern development, and in the possibility to identify ancient features, such as Roman roads, large reservoirs and *qanats*.<sup>22</sup> This methodology was applied in other regions of the Near East. For example, northern Syria and southern Turkey, which have been extensively studied both through regional surveys and excavations and by using aerial and satellite photography, provide a valuable basis for a methodological comparison in the interaction between the use of photographic documentation and its implementation in regional studies.<sup>23</sup> The massive photographic material in archives around the globe provides now new challenges to the modern research of the 'Ancient Lands' in the Levant.

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<sup>22</sup> See for example, the documentation of fields in the Negev, Keidar 1967; the identification of ancient roads and structures in the Syrian desert, Poidebards 1934; and the research on radial road systems in Syria, Casana 2013.

<sup>23</sup> See for example, the use of CORONA satellite photography as a tool in the archaeological research of these regions: Casana 2013; Kennedy 1998; Ur 2003.

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# Hiding Complexes in Galilee: Aspects and Significance

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*Since the latter part of the twentieth century, following their initial discovery in the 1980s, over fifty ancient hiding complexes have been discovered and documented in Galilee, where seventy-five of these hiding complexes are currently recorded. Their exploration and limited archaeological excavations provide us with new understanding and insights that are corroborated by historical records. It is also now possible to provide some with relative dating, analyze the archaeological and numismatic finds, and draw typological comparisons with the hiding systems in Judea. The exploration of the Galilean hiding complexes has also intensified research into the defensive measures employed by the Jewish population in times of urgent need in the Second Temple period.*

*The article presents a corpus of all the currently recognized hiding complexes in Galilee, mapping and classifying them according to the Judean hiding systems' typological characteristics. Many hiding complexes in Galilee were hewn out of and into ancient cisterns, oil presses, ritual baths, burial caves, basements, and underground storerooms. Some were roughly and hastily cut without no attempt to smooth the hewn rock, and some were meticulously chiseled and finished. They can therefore be divided into different periods based on their typology. Analysis of the archaeological and numismatic finds strengthens a number of conclusions regarding the function of the hiding complexes in times of need and crisis, specifically in the Roman period. The data gained from the surveys and excavations provides an extra dimension that deepens our understanding of the defensive methods used by the Jews during the two major anti-Roman revolts. The article also investigates the possibility, suggested by the finds from some of the hiding complexes that they were prepared in advance for the Bar Kokhba Revolt, even if the rebellion did not lead to actual armed conflict in Galilee.*

**KEYWORDS:** GALILEE; JEWISH; HIDING COMPLEX; UNDERGROUND TUNNEL; BAR KOKHBA REVOLT.

## The Research History of Hiding Complexes

From the standpoint of archaeological and historical research, the hiding complexes in the Galilee are less well-known than those in the Judean foothills and the rest of Judea (Weiss 2007). Studies and surveys of hiding complexes have been conducted in the Judean foothills since the 1970s (Alon 1987; Kloner and Tepper 1987; Tsafir 1984: 31–33). In recent decades, this defense-system method employed by the Jews has also been explored in Samaria and the Land of Benjamin (Raviv 2018: 225–229), as in other regions in central Israel and in Galilee (Melamed 2020: 7–112; Shivtiel 2019: 97–212). I will propose a categorization and characterization of the hiding complexes based on well-defined criteria and I will consider whether they are comparable with those in the Judean foothills and Judea.

Beginning in the 1960s, reports of the discovery of underground tunnels in various parts of the Galilee began to arrive. At first, those reporting on them did not use the term 'hiding complex', which was only coined in the research lexicon in 1977 (Alon 1987), and scholars used other terms like 'underground tunnels' or 'underground warehouses'. The tunnels' links to the Jewish revolt were only recognized at a later date. A preliminary survey of hiding complexes conducted by Yigal Tepper and Yuval Shahar in the 1980s reported 20 hiding complexes in the Galilee, which they associated with the Bar Kokhba Revolt (AD 132–136; Tepper and Shahar 1987a: 279–317).

In 2008, Amos Kloner, Boaz Zissu and Yoav Shahar stated that 27 hiding complexes had been found in the

Galilee (Kloner, Zissu and Shahar 2008: 95). Based on the discoveries at Jotapata (Yodfat) and Kafr Kanna, which revealed findings from the Great Revolt (Alexandre 2008; Aviam 2005: 48–51, 128–129), they asserted that hiding complexes were first hewn in the Galilee even before the Great Revolt and were probably used during more than one period. In the course of my doctoral research in 2005–2009, my colleague Vladimir Boslov and I discovered and documented 40 previously unknown hiding complexes in the Galilee. My recent research findings show that a few of the hiding complexes were prepared, or rehabilitated, for the Second Revolt. In fact, we have 16 hiding complexes in the Galilee that have been scientifically excavated and the ceramic material discovered in them was from the 2nd century AD (see, for example, I'billin, Horbat Roma and 'Enot Sho'im<sup>1</sup>) despite the fact that we still do not have any physical evidence for the Galilee's participation in this revolt.

## Recent Research on Hiding Complexes (Figure 1)

It subsequently became possible to catalog and reexamine all the hiding complexes that had been recognized in the Galilee. The following report lists 59 sites in the Galilee where 75 hiding complexes have been found (including some that are in doubt). Because of the physical difficulties and the harsh conditions in the hiding complexes and burrows, archaeological excavations have only been partially made in 21 of the 75 known hiding complexes. Between 2018–2020, my colleagues and I conducted

<sup>1</sup> See Leibner, Shivtiel and Distelfeld 2015; Muqari 1999; Rochman 1985: 35; For a broad discussion of the significance of the findings in

the context of the possible planning of the Bar Kokhba revolt in the Galilee, see Shivtiel 2021: 451–488.



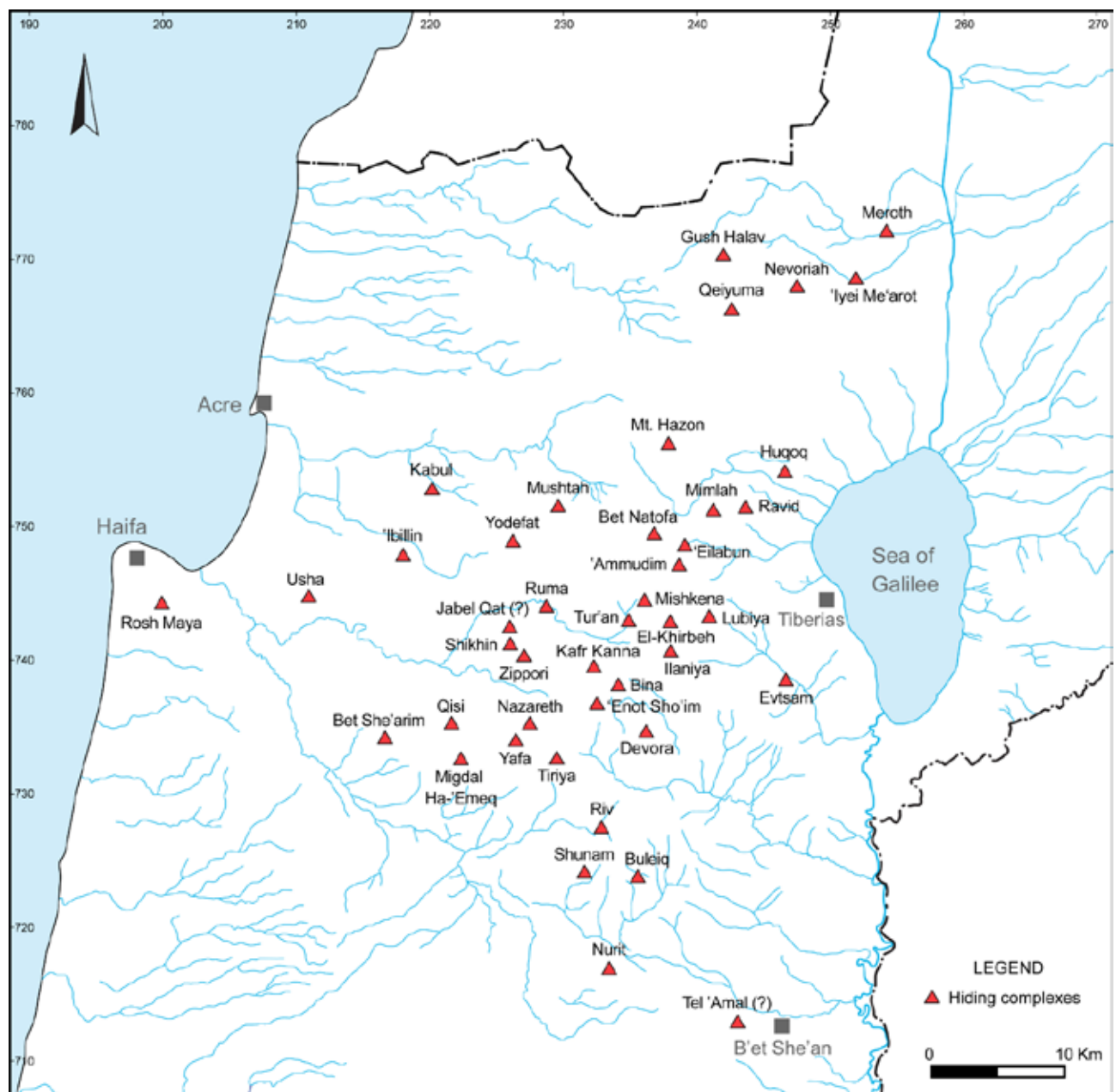


Figure 1. Distribution map of the hiding complexes in Galilee.

archaeological excavations of four newly discovered hiding complexes in Galilee, at Horbat Huqoq, 'Enot Sho'im, Horbat 'Amudim, and Horbat Mishkena (Leibner, Shvitiel and Distelfeld 2015; Shvitiel 2016a; Shvitiel and Osband 2019; Osband and Shvitiel [in preparation]).

The presentation of the new data constitutes a major update of the scope of the hiding phenomenon in the Galilee. For the purpose of reexamining the hiding complexes, the subterranean chambers were documented according to accepted speleological practice, as is customary at the Cave Research Center. In this study, the hiding complexes previously discovered in the Galilee were re-documented and remapped (since in some cases data were omitted from

the previous surveys) and new hiding complexes were documented and mapped after the crawlways and chambers in them were carefully examined. Mapping and data-gathering in caves requires spending long periods of time in subterranean chambers under difficult conditions. In many caves there are ticks that infest every protective garment currently available and some of the ticks carry tick-borne relapsing fever. Nevertheless, I was able to thoroughly survey the nature of the hiding complexes and to identify them according to the categories below.

The following sites and subterranean cavities in the Galilee have been identified as hiding complexes:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> All the definitions for identifying hiding complexes are according to the rules established by scholars (see Shvitiel 2019: 97–101). Some of the sites and chambers in this list are included despite lacking some of the

features of hiding complexes. When I explored them, I was not convinced that they had all the elements that characterize hiding

1. Gush Halav (Gischala)\*—at the top of the village of Jish, east of the upper synagogue.
2. Gush Halav\*—in the center of the village of Jish, in the courtyard of a private house.
3. Gush Halav\*—on the eastern slope of Nahal Gush Halav.
4. Meroth—the area of the ancient synagogue.
5. Meroth\*—2km east of the village (inside a burial cave).
6. Qiyyuma—on the northern side of the Meron–Safed Road.
7. Nabratein (Naburia)—Biriya Forest near Amuka, south of the synagogue.
- 8–17. ‘Iyei Me‘arot\*—Hatzor Ha-Gelilit (ten hiding complexes).
18. Mt. Hazon—near Carmiel.
19. Huqoq—Horbat Huqoq, near the Sea of Galilee.
20. Huqoq\*—cistern at Horbat Huqoq, leading under the synagogue.
21. Mimlah—in the western portion of Horbat Mimlah.
22. Mimlah\*—about 500m south of the hiding complex in the western portion of Horbat Mimlah.
23. Ravid—Horbat Ravid.
24. ‘Elabbon—east of the village of ‘Elabbon.
25. Horbat Mishtah—a hill above the town of ‘Arraba.
26. Jotapata—on the upper portion of the southwestern slope of the site.
27. Jotapata—on the lower portion of the southwestern slope of the site.
- 28–31. I‘billin—in the Crusader fortress in the town of I‘billin (four hiding complexes).
32. I‘billin—in the town of I‘billin.
33. Beit Netofa—at Tel Beit Netofa.
34. Khan Lubia—near Kibbutz Lavi, east of the Golani Junction.
35. El-Khirbe 1—On a hill west of Khan Lubia.
36. El-Khirbe 2—East of the hilltop.
37. Ruma—in the Beit Rimon Valley.
38. Kafr Kanna\*—north of the Zipporit industrial zone, on the border of the village of Mashhad.
- 39–40. Kafr Kanna—in the northern residential area (two hiding complexes).
41. Kafr Kanna—in the center of town (at Jebel Khuwweikha).
42. Kafr Kanna—about 40m west of the hiding in the center of town (at Jebel Khuwweikha).
43. Kafr Kanna\*—1km south of the town.
- 44–45. Tur‘an\*—in the town of Tur‘an, close to the Golani Junction (two hiding complexes).
46. Ilaniyya\*—at Horbat Sejera, close to the town of ‘Afula.
47. Evtam (Kh. Bessum)—in the Yavne‘el Valley.
48. Jebel Qat—north of Zippori.
- 49–50. Shikhin\*—west of Jebel Qat (two hiding complexes).
51. Zippori—on Zippori hill.
52. Zippori\*—about 80m west of the Zippori fortress.
53. Horbat Bina—north of Ein Mahil, close to Nazareth.
54. Horbat Tiria\*—on a hill southeast of Nazareth.
55. Nazareth—St. Joseph’s Church.
- 56–57. Horbat Devora\* (Kh. Dabbura)—1km northeast of the village of Dabburiya (two hiding complexes).
58. Beit She‘arim—in the courtyard of the Zaid house, near the synagogue.
59. Beit She‘arim—southwest of the Zaid statue (Area D), the recent excavations by Adi Erlich.
60. Migdal Ha‘emeq.
61. Horbat Riv\*—on the southern bank of Nahal Tavor.
62. Shunem (Sulam)—on the southern slope of Giv‘at Hamoreh.
63. Horbat Bolek\* (Buleiq)—near Ein Harod.
64. Horbat Nurit\* (Nuris)—on Mt. Gilboa.
65. Nahal ‘Amal crawlways—in the Gan Ha-Shlosa National Park, on the northern bank of Nahal ‘Amal (without the features of hiding complexes).<sup>3</sup>
66. Tel ‘Amal tunnel—at Horbat Tel el-‘Asi, on the southern bank of Nahal ‘Amal (without the features of hiding complexes).
67. ‘Enot Sho‘im, Ein Mahil (south east of Nazareth).
68. Kabol (in the lower west Galilee).
69. Horbat ‘Amudim\*, near Golani Junction.
- 70–71. Horbat Mishkanal\*, 2, near Golani Junction (two hiding complexes).

complexes. An asterisk indicates a hiding complex discovered by myself and a team headed by myself and Vladimir Boslov of the ICRC.  
<sup>3</sup> This underground system was identified by Tepper and Shahaar as a hiding complex. From an in-depth examination we conducted in this system, it does not show the known characteristics of the hiding

systems. According to additional underground systems discovered in the area of the Gan Ha-Shlosa National Park in 2019, it can be said that these are systems of tunnels that carried water and their exact function is currently being investigated by us today.

72. Horbat Qisi\*, near Zarzir village.

73. Rushmiya\*—Romema, Haifa.

74. Horbat Usha\*

75. Geva Parashim (Tel Abu-Shusha), near Kibbutz Mishmar Ha-‘Emeq.

Like the hiding complexes in the Judean foothills, those in the Galilee can be divided into six main categories:<sup>4</sup>



Figure 2. Horbat Dabbura, hiding complex hewn roughly.

### 1. Simple Hiding Complexes, Roughly Finished, and Crudely Hewn (Figures 2, 3)

Subterranean chambers roughly hewn for hiding purposes, prepared in haste without smooth dressing of the walls. Some of these hiding complexes are connected together with elaborate tunnels leading to an industrial installation, which become part of the hiding complex. These small hideouts resemble the Judean ones discovered by Kloner at an unnamed site (Kloner 1987a) and by Zissu at Horbat ‘Ethri, as well as the one found beneath the synagogue at Susiya (Chamber 8); all these hiding complexes were used in the Second Temple period (Kloner 1987b; Kloner and Zissu 2005: 132; Shvitiel 2014: 112–223; Zissu 2002: 168). The openings and crawlways were hastily smoothed, and effort was clearly put into making it as hard as possible for uninvited guests to gain entry to the subterranean chambers, especially Roman soldiers with their heavy

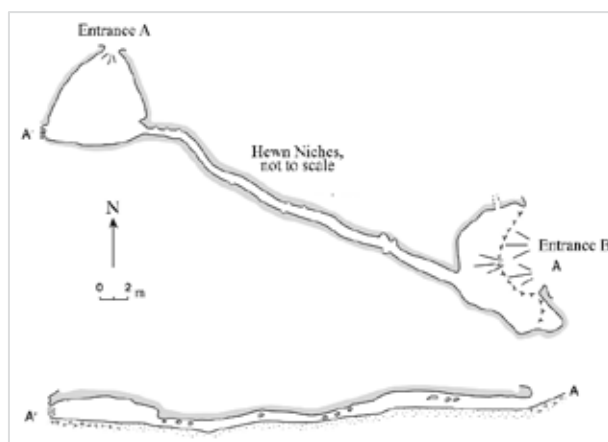


Figure 3. Horbat Dabbura, plan of hiding complex.

armor. Chambers are connected by simple narrow, low tunnels that sometimes join one or two cavities together or link up to an ancient cistern and other hewn cavities, as at Horbat Dabbura, Horbat Mimlah, Horbat Mushtah, Horbat Yodefah (Shvitiel 2019: 137–138, 140–142). It is as though the workers simply created dark, narrow hiding complexes in which the only way to get anywhere was to crawl. About 30 of such hiding complexes were hewn in Galilean villages in anticipation of hard times. Some complexes of this type breached ancient cisterns, ritual baths, and various industrial installations. The finds indicate that this type dates from the Early Roman period onward. It seems, then, that these hiding complexes were created in preparation for the Great Revolt. Hints for the use of hiding complexes at this time can be found in Josephus’s descriptions of Jewish hiding places during the Great Revolt (Shvitiel 2011: 24–25).

### 2. Elaborate and Meticulously-Hewn Hiding Complexes (Figures 4, 5)

These complexes, hewn with great care and smoothly dressed, resemble the hideouts at Horbat Ga’ada, Horbat Beit Loya (the large hiding complex) and Rasem er-Rasum



Figure 4. ‘Enot Sho’im, hiding complex elaborates and meticulously.

<sup>4</sup> On similar categories and other possible ways of classifying the hiding complexes, see Tepper 1987; Shvitiel 2019: 98–101; Zissu 2002: 274–275.



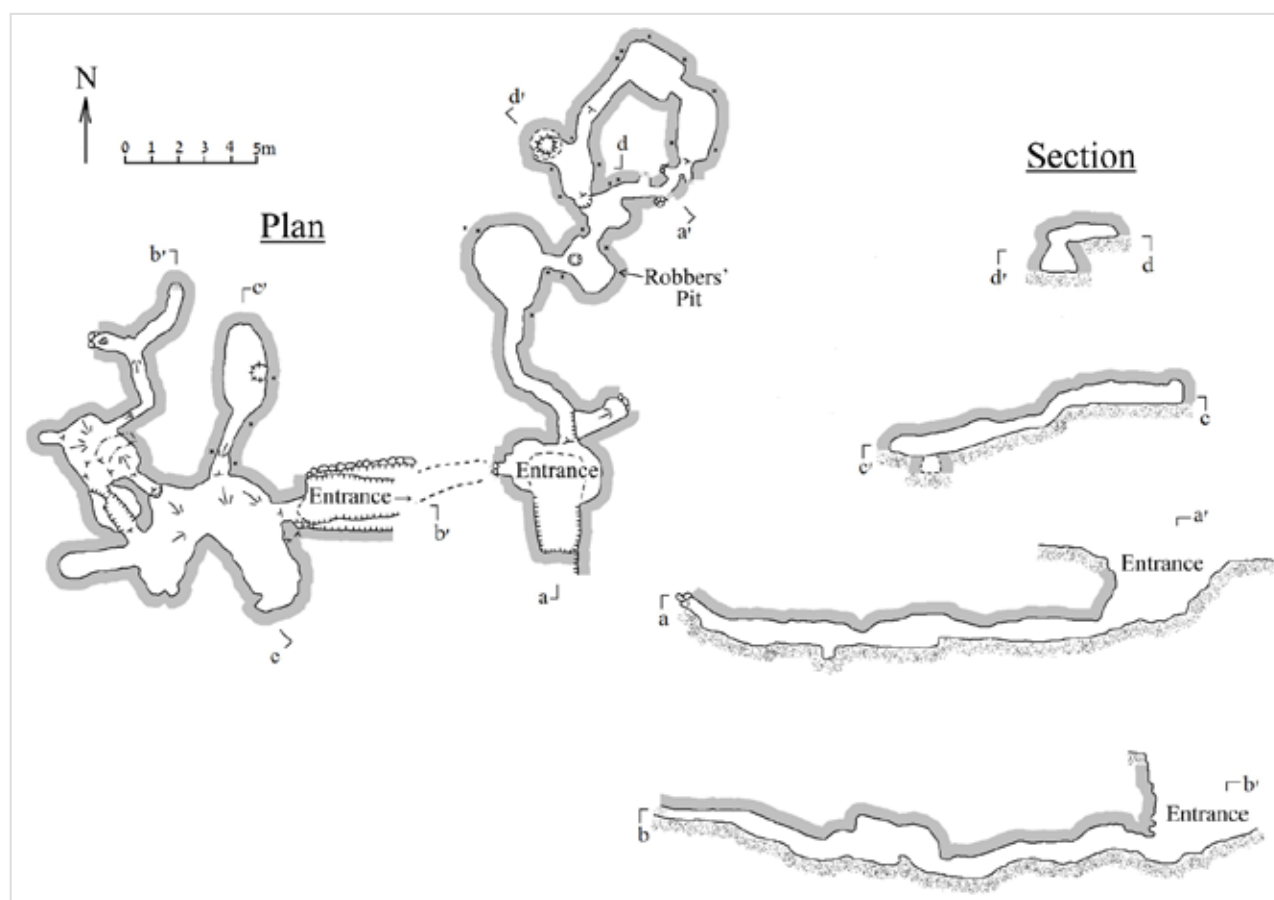


Figure 5. 'Enot Sho'im, plan of hiding complex elaborates and meticulously.

in the Judean foothills (Kloner and Tzoran 1987; Tepper and Shahrar 1987b: 105; Tepper and Shahrar 1987c). The well-developed hiding complexes investigated in the Judean foothills have been dated to the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. About 20 hiding complexes surveyed in the Galilee share the same form and typology. They resemble the hideouts at I'billin, Horbat Ruma and 'Enot Sho'im (Shivtiel 2019: 147, 156, 164–165). The entrance tunnels can only be crawled through. They are long and winding and contain multiple right-angled bends expressly designed to obstruct an enemy equipped with cumbersome weapons, such as the long spear (*filum*) that was common in the Roman army. Some of these complexes are incorporated in ancient cisterns, ritual baths and various industrial installations and therefore may also have been hewn and/or used in the 2nd century AD. They may also indicate preparations for the Bar Kokhba revolt, even if sufficient historical evidence for the Galilee's participation in this revolt is lacking.

### 3. Hiding Complexes Hewn out of Rock-Cut Subterranean Chambers Formerly Used as Storage Facilities for Agricultural Produce, Cisterns, Olive Presses, or Ritual Baths (Figures 6–9)

These chambers were closed, cool, and rainproof, and it was relatively simple to incorporate or convert them into hiding complexes. Similar hiding complexes have been found in the Judean foothills (e.g., at Ahuzat Hazan and Horbat Shem Tov; Avni *et al.* 1987; Tepper and Shahrar 1987d). In the Galilee, most hiding complexes of this type



Figure 6. Horbat Mishtah, hiding complex hewn from cistern.

have been found in subterranean chambers originally hewn as cisterns or storage facilities; a minority are in chambers used as olive presses or burial caves (below; e.g., at el-Khirbe and Ilaniyya, Horbat Meroth; Shivtiel 2019: 110–112, 151–152, 168–169). In 19 of them I found narrow crawlways, some of them well finished and others simply leading to additional rock-cut chambers. Most of these hiding complexes were designed to incorporate preexisting cisterns or ritual baths, such as at Meroth, and Zippori. In some places, however, certain facilities were eliminated when the narrow crawlways were added. Cases of this sort are also documented in the Judean foothills, as at Horbat



Figure 7. *Horbat Mishtah*, hiding complex, plan hewn from cistern.

Loya, in Complexes 6, 20, and 30 at *Horbat Midras*, and at *Kh. el-Aqed* (Kloner 1987c: 242, illustration on p. 245; Kloner 1987d: 138–139; Tepper and Shahr 1987c: 135–136). In a few cases, such as the complex at *Horbat Mishtah*, *Horbat Ilaniya* (*Sejera*) and one at *Zippori*, the openings of the crawlways were hewn a few meters above the floor of a cistern and water continued to be stored there up to the height of the openings. The fact that only the water was visible from above camouflaged the hideout well. This phenomenon is found at *Kh. el-Aqed* in the Judean foothills, at *Horbat Naqiq*, and at the *Nahal Yattir* site (Gichon 1982; Zissu 2002: 213, 222). Presumably, in a time of emergency, when the Galileans realized that



Figure 8. *Horbat Ilaniya* (*Sejera*), hiding complex hewn from olive Press.

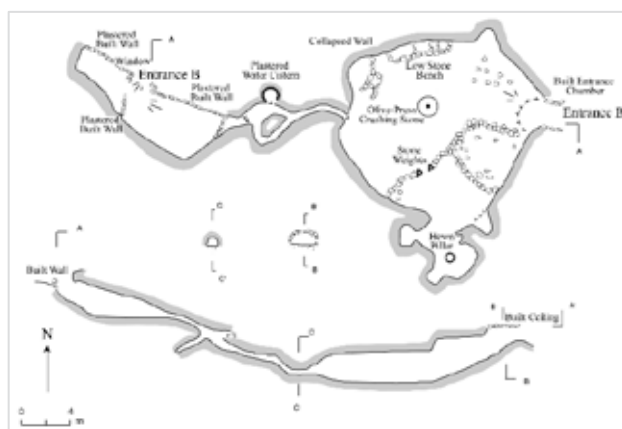


Figure 9. *Horbat Ilaniya* (*Sejera*), plan of hiding complex hewn from olive Press.



Figure 10. *Shunem* (*Sulam*), hiding complex hewn into burial cave.

hiding complexes could save lives, they decided to give up as many important facilities as they could and to turn the underground installations into places of refuge to save their lives. Such adaptations seem to have been done in various different times of distress (Shivtiel 2016b).

#### 4. Hiding Complexes Hewn into Burial Caves (Figures 10, 11)

Such complexes are also extremely rare in Judea, where they are only found there at *Kh. Umm Burj* (*Horbat Burgin*) and *Horbat Benaya* (Kloner and Zissu 2005: 129). Three of the six burial caves converted into hidings in the Galilee were located within the village of 'Iyei Me'arot. The other three were outside or on the outskirts of villages, as at *Horbat Meroth* and *Shunem* (Shivtiel 2019: 110–112, 118–123).

#### 5. Escape Crawlways (Figures 12, 13)

This type of subterranean cavity is rare in both Judea and the Galilee and due to the very few examples it is hard to characterize their use and scope. The only written document in our possession that may describe the use of an escape crawlway in the Second Temple period is by Josephus, who recounts how during the Great Revolt the besieged people of Jotapata used a narrow, hidden crevice as a crawlway for transporting commodities and bringing



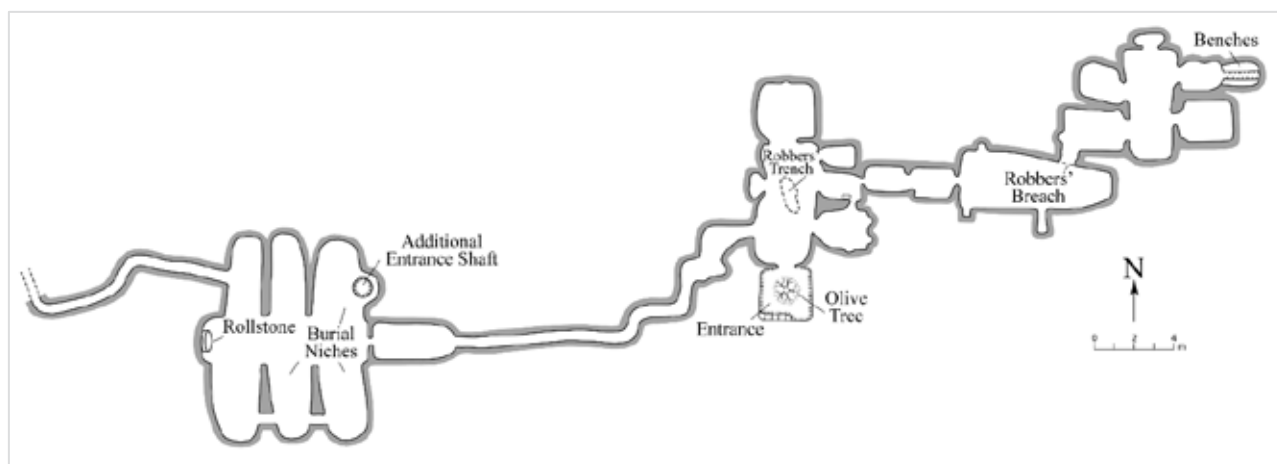


Figure 11. Shunem (Sulam), plan of hiding complex hewn into burial cave.



Figure 12. Gush Halav, entrance to escape tunnel.

news.<sup>5</sup> The escape crawlway at Gush Halav is an example of a crawlway with a specific purpose, namely to serve as a hidden route to a spring and a concealed exit from the village (Shivtiel 2019: 107–108). In contrast, Mordechai Gichon suggested, based on Cassius Dio's description of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, that during that revolt the rebels used the hiding complexes and escape crawlways in two stages and for two different purposes. At first the hiding complexes served as bases for surprise attacks and ambushes, whereas later the rebels used the crawlways to escape from walled towns. As an example of such dual-use

hiding complexes, Gichon points to Kh. el-Aqed, which was surrounded by a wall. Gush Halav was also walled, and dual use may have been made of the escape crawlway there as well (Gichon 1982: 40–41). Another example of an escape system is found at the Nahal Yattir site. In this hiding complex two crawlways were hewn, one leading to a cistern so that water could secretly be drawn, and the other leading out of town, to the slope of Nahal Yattir (Zissu 2002: 222–223).

## 6. Hiding Complexes Under Ancient Synagogues (Figures 14–16)

It has recently become apparent that another type of hiding complex can be added to this list, discovered beneath (or beside) ancient synagogues in the southwestern Hebron Hills. Excavations conducted since 2011 by Jodi Magness at the ancient synagogue of Huqoq have indicated the possibility that the phenomena may be related (Shivtiel 2019: 134–135). Magness dates the synagogue to the 5th

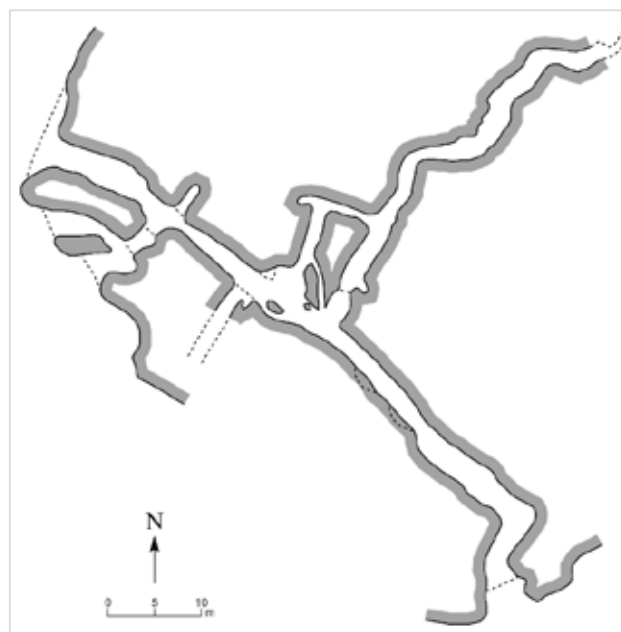


Figure 13. Gush Halav, plan of escape tunnel.

<sup>5</sup> *War*, 190–192; during the Roman siege of Jerusalem, Josephus describes the use of canals and tunnels to which the Jews fled to find

refuge (for a summary of Josephus's testimonies, see Shivtiel 2016b: 186–188).





Figure 14. *Huqoq*, a cistern that leads to a hiding complex under the synagogue.

century AD. I was only able to excavate a limited part (Courtesy of Jodi Magness), of the underground tunnels, but thoroughly examined the hiding complex I identified at the site even before the discovery of the overlying synagogue. Even though this hiding complex was begun at an earlier date, the fact that it was clearly also ready for use in the 5th century led to a study of ancient synagogue sites where hiding complexes dating to this period have been found in the southern Hebron Hills and in Galilee (Shivtiel 2016a).

Hiding complexes have been discovered beneath synagogues at Susiya, Eshtamo'a, Ma'on and 'Anim (Shivtiel 2016a) and in Galilee at Meroth, Naburiya, *Huqoq* and Beit She'arim (Shivtiel 2019: 110–111, 114–115, 134–135, 184–185). The complexes beneath synagogues in the southern Hebron Hills have been surveyed but not excavated. Of the similar hiding complexes in Galilee, two—Naburiya and Beit She'arim—have not been examined or excavated, while the hiding complexes beneath synagogues at Meroth and *Huqoq* have been partially excavated and surveyed. The common characteristic emerging from the hiding complexes beneath synagogues at the two ends of the country is the fact that the complexes were used or prepared for use as refuges that could be reached from inside synagogues while the synagogue above them was in use (i.e., 4th–5th centuries AD; Shivtiel 2016a).

#### Numismatic Finds from the Hiding Complexes

We have very few numismatic finds from the Galilean hiding complexes or their immediate surroundings. It should be remembered that most of the hiding complexes in Galilee lie inside existing settlements, which were established over or alongside the ancient Jewish settlements. Over the centuries, as these 'newer' settlements developed, the hiding complexes were discovered and emptied of any contents they may have held. As a result, any coin found while surveying the hiding complexes is considered a valuable dating tool, although the coins cannot be used to determine exactly when the complexes were hewn. The few finds presented



Figure 15. *Huqoq*, a tunnel that leads to a hiding complex under the synagogue.

below can therefore be regarded as adding valuable data to the typological classification of the hiding complexes.

While surveying the Galilee sites, a number of coins were discovered in three different hiding complexes, the first being that of 'Iyei Me'arot (Mugar el-Kheit). This site is a settlement with 104 caves. Some of the caves were for residential use, some for storage, some for industrial use, some for burial, and some as hiding complexes. The latter use sometimes overrode the above functions (Shivtiel and Stepansky 2013). A number of coins were found in this complex. A Trajanic coin was found inside the complex and other coins were found on the ground or in the soil adjacent to hiding entrances. The various Phoenician coins found here were part of the coinage in circulation in this geographical area (Syon 2004: 262–266). An Octavian coin minted in Damascus dated to 32 BC could have been brought to the site by a Roman soldier who was on his way to join the Roman legions going to Egypt, or by a merchant. Agrippa II (AD 50–100) began his rule of the Galilee in Nero's reign (AD 54–68). Coins found at this site from the Tiberias mint date to year 15 of Agrippa's reign and were therefore minted in AD 74/5. A coin minted in Caesarea by the Roman administration under Domitian (AD 81–96) was of a type characteristically used by the Roman army, which probably patrolled the Jewish settlement after the end of the Great Revolt in order to maintain order. The second site was at Shihin (Asochis), where four coins were found. The first was an Alexander Jannaeus coin; the second an Antiochus IV (173/2–168 BC) coin struck in Akko-Ptolemais; the third, a John Hyrcanus I Group A; and the fourth, a Hyrcanus coin from

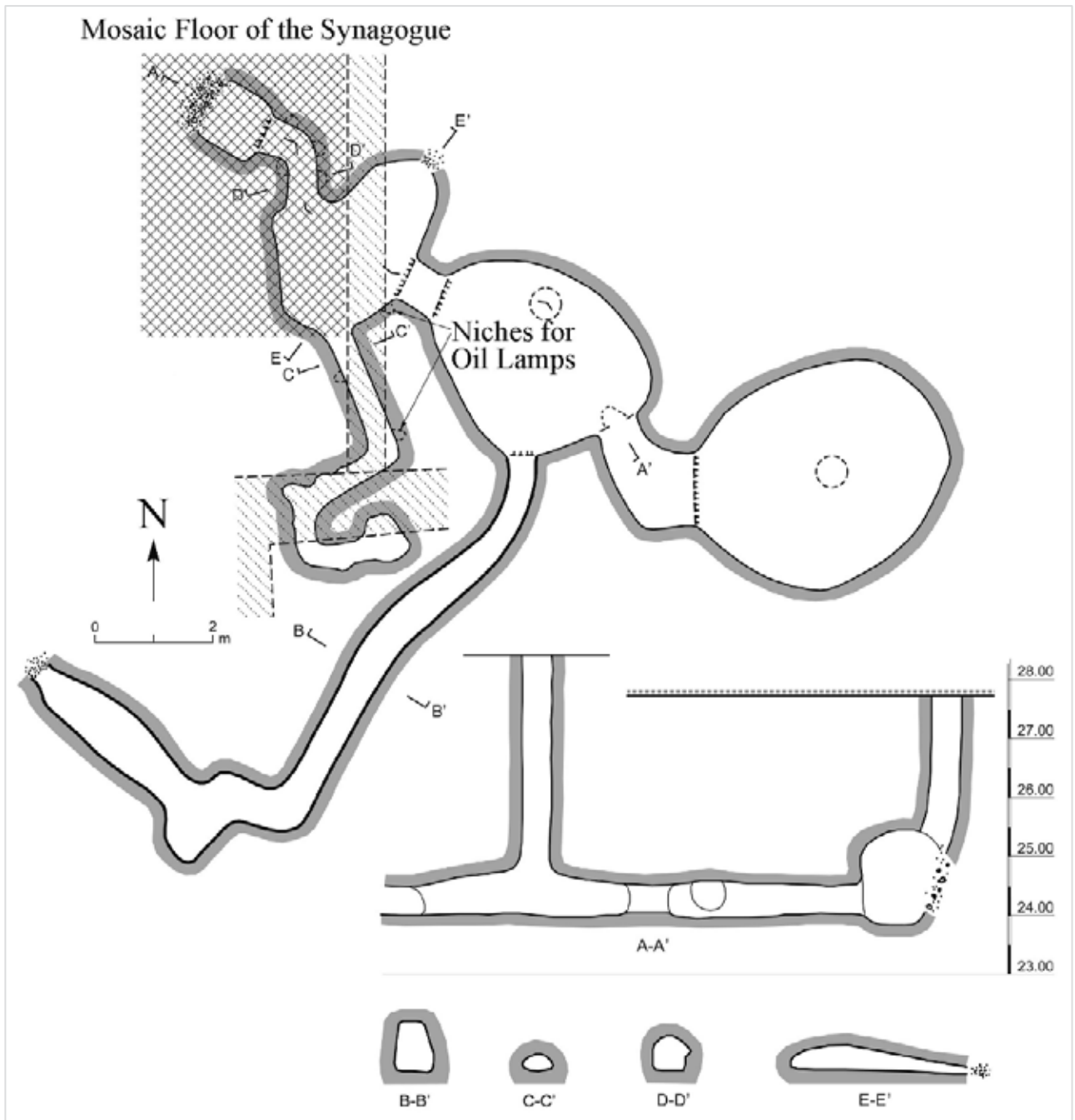


Figure 16. *Huqoq*, plan of the hiding complex under the synagogue.

200–187 BC. In a hiding complex at *Horbat 'Enot Sho'im* (near 'En Mahal village), Uzi Leibner, the author and Nir Distelfeld excavated the hiding complexes and discovered a number of coins indicating their use as hiding places before and after the Bar Kokhba Revolt (Leibner, Shvitiel and Distelfeld 2015). A Trajanic coin was discovered inside the hiding complex at 'Enot Sho'im. The coin, dated to Trajan's rule (AD 98–117), is a *quadrans* minted in Rome; the obverse features the head of Heracles and blurry traces of the inscription: [IMP CAES] TRAI[AN]AVG GE[RM]; the reverse shows a boar and traces of a blurred inscription: [SC] The coin finds reflect the historical continuity of settlement at the sites and the use of the hiding complexes there. Two other coins were found that

can be associated with the remains in the dwelling from which the hiding complex was hewn. The first, which was found in a mechanically dug section, is a rare coin of Trebonianus Gallus (AD 251–253) minted in Neapolis. The obverse features the bust of the emperor and the reverse—Nemesis standing, resting one hand on a griffon sitting on a small column. To the left is Victory holding Mount Gerizim with outstretched arms. The other coin, found in mechanically cleared debris, was probably of Caracalla (AD 198–217); however, its poor state of preservation prevented us from identifying the mint. The few finds from the dwelling are thus homogeneous, all dating from the 3rd century AD. Moreover, coins dating to

the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries AD which were found there further attest to continuous settlement at the sites.<sup>6</sup>

### Discussion and Conclusion

Although they are far fewer in number, the Galilean hiding complexes have typological features resembling those of the hiding complexes in Judea. However, each contains its own unique features. For example, they differ in size and in the number of chambers. The hiding complexes can be divided into two main types according to shared typological similarities that are clearly visible, some having been crudely hewn and others more meticulously finished (Shivtiel and Osband 2019). Boaz Zissu, in his doctoral thesis, suggested for the first time the possibility that small hiding complexes hewn in a quick, cursory manner without ensuring a fine finish were primarily connected to the Great Revolt (Zissu 2002: 169). He also suggested that more complex hiding systems that were smoothed, had sharp angles, and were located at different levels, had been prepared and used in connection with the Bar Kokhba revolt (Eshel and Zissu 2015: 52–54). In light of the similarities between 20 hiding complexes in the Galilee and those in the Judean foothills, it is possible that those hiding complexes were also prepared for the Bar Kokhba Revolt and, as I claim, there are some archaeological indications of this possibility.<sup>7</sup> It should be emphasized that the scope of the ceramic finds inside the hiding complexes extends from the 1st century BC to the 1st–5th centuries AD, and the finds are almost always intermixed.

It has become clear that some of the small, simple hiding complexes in the Galilee date from the Great Revolt, just as the simple hiding complexes in the Judean foothills were hewn for the Great Revolt (Gichon 1982: 35; Shahar 2003). More than a third of the hiding complexes in the Galilee are of the simple type, such as those at Gush Halav, Horbat Yodefah, Tur'an, Kafr Kanna (Area W), and Horbat Dabbura, for instance (Shivtiel 2019: 104–105, 143–144, 159–160, 183–184). The finds in the simple hiding complexes on the lower slope of Jotapata and in the hideout at Kafr Kanna clearly attest to the fact that these complexes were hewn during or before the Great Revolt (Alexandre 2008). Many of the hiding complexes in Galilee were initially roughly cut in the rock and meticulously hewn passages were added to them at a later stage. Many others in Galilee began as ancient installations to which intricate passages were added at a later date. This type may therefore have been either in use or prepared during the two revolts.

Additional, unsophisticated simple and roughly-finished hiding complexes in the Galilee such as those above may have been hewn in the late Second Temple period; the

nature of these complexes may reinforce the suggestion that they were hurriedly hewn during the Great Revolt. As mentioned above, Josephus hints extensively in his writings at the widespread use of subterranean hiding chambers (Shivtiel 2016b).

On the other hand, some of the sophisticated Galilean hiding complexes hewn from the outset as hiding complexes could have been made in preparation for the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Because most of the sophisticated hideouts in the Judean foothills were used by the Jews during the Bar Kokhba Revolt, we cannot rule out the possibility that some Jews in the Galilee prepared for the revolt in the same way (Shahar 2001: 92). Presumably, some of the Jews who were in hiding in the Judean foothills at the end of the Bar Kokhba Revolt survived and fled to the Galilee (Samet 1986; Shivtiel 2016b; Stepansky 2000). Historical sources indicate that some of the Judean population moved to the Galilee following the Bar Kokhba Revolt; this is apparently reflected in a list of the 24 priestly courses.<sup>8</sup>

The large concentration of 104 caves at 'Iyei Me'arot that were used for various purposes may be indicative of this. Thus, it is possible that some of the Galilean hiding complexes were hewn in preparation for the Bar Kokhba Revolt (and some of them later), even if the Galilee did not ultimately take part in the fighting.

Based on the new information presented in this paper on the Galilean hiding complexes and their distribution, we see that the enigma of these hiding complexes is worth discussing and that they stand as testimony to the fear of the Roman government at various times, not only prior to the Great Revolt or as preparations for the Bar Kokhba Revolt, although their rudimentary components, at least, may have been created and used in the Great Revolt as we can also assume from Josephus. Hence, presumably, the simple hiding complexes without attractive finishing were hewn during the Great Revolt, whereas the smoother, more developed ones, such as those at I'billin, Kh. Ruma, 'Enot Sho'im and Jebel Khuwweikha in Kafr Kanna are reflect use in the 2nd century AD. The relatively large number of hiding complexes hewn out of ritual baths or cisterns—thus rendering them unusable for water storage—seems to indicate that the Jews of the Galilee were in such distress in the Early Roman period that they valued places to hide over available water sources or the realization of their religious needs.<sup>9</sup>

Several conclusions can be drawn regarding the hiding complexes in the Galilee. Most of the hiding complexes discovered in Galilee have all the typical features of simple or well-developed hiding complexes in Judea. Overall, the hiding complexes surveyed in the Galilee seem to have

<sup>6</sup> A number of coins have also recently been discovered in the hiding complex at Shihin and are pending publication in a book by David Aden on the excavations at that site.

<sup>7</sup> On the simple hiding complexes from the early 1st century AD, see Kloner and Zissu 2005: 132–133; Zissu and Ganor 2002; Yadin, Oppenheimer, Foerster, and Aviam noted the possibility that the Galilean hiding complexes were created in preparation for the Great Revolt; see Aviam 1983: 56–57; 2005: 60; Foerster 1983; Oppenheimer 1982; Shivtiel 2019: 213; Shivtiel and Osband 2018: 38; On the

archaeological finds linking the Galilee to the preparations for the Bar Kokhba revolt, see Shivtiel 2021: 451–488.

<sup>8</sup> The *baraita* is preserved only in inscriptions and *piyyutim* (Safrai 1981: 263). On the ties between Judea and the Galilee, see also Urbach 1988: 330–346.

<sup>9</sup> Tepper and Tepper 2004: 166, note more than 30 localities in the Lower Galilee where cisterns fell into disuse due to the hewing of hiding complexes.



unique features of their own: (1) in many cases, hiding complexes were hewn into earlier facilities, causing those facilities to fall into disuse; (2) most of the crawlways in the Galilean hiding complexes were hewn roughly with no particular attention to finish; (3) the crawlways in the Galilean hideouts are neither winding nor especially long and do not have sharply angled bends, except for about 20 hiding complexes that are elaborate and meticulously hewn with sharp bends, characteristic of the time of the Second Revolt.

The two types of hiding places found in both Judea and the Galilee—refuge caves (or cliff shelters)<sup>10</sup> and hiding complexes—show that the Jewish population was highly motivated and had impressive organizational ability. Preparing the subterranean hiding places for troubled times was a collective activity that required large-scale, organized work. In many cases, we can compare the preparation of the hiding complexes in the Galilee with activity in Judea between the two revolts: subterranean complexes were hewn and hiding places were prepared, sometimes eliminating important underground facilities such as ritual baths, cisterns, storehouses, and even tombs. These activities were motivated by increased concern for personal safety and attest to the distress of the Jews of Galilee.

We cannot date the hewing of the Galilean hiding complexes with precision. Presumably, some of them date from as early as the Second Temple period (with the hewing activity intensifying during the Great Revolt). Others were hewn before the Bar Kokhba Revolt, and others were in use afterwards. It seems that the Jews of the Galilee prepared subterranean chambers for refuge and hiding complexes at times when they sensed a real physical threat to their lives from the Romans, over a prolonged period of time.

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<sup>10</sup> On refuge caves in Judea and their parallels in the Galilee (cliff shelters), see Eshel and Amit 1999:13; Shvitiel 2008, 2014:53–102.

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# An Early Islamic Residential Quarter at Tabariyya

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*During the years 2009–2010 vast excavations were conducted at the site of the Roman-Byzantine period theater located north of the *cardo maximus* of Tiberias. Over the well-preserved remains of the theater a rich early Islamic residential quarter was revealed and researched. This article presents the urban lay out of the residential quarter, and its varied types of large houses, most of which had specious gardens and water related installations. The rich variety of finds accumulated during the excavations seems to identify the ethnicity of the site population.*

KEYWORDS: TABARIYYA; EARLY ISLAMIC; RESIDENTIAL QUARTER; COURTYARDS; FOUNTAINS.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The history of the city reaches back to the early decades of the 1st c. AD and its founding by Herod Antipas. The establishment of Tiberias by Antipas created a Galilean polis, Roman in style, layout and nature, and predominantly Jewish in ethnicity. Founded on a narrow strip on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee Tiberias reflects in its urban plan the best of the new imperial architecture of the eastern provinces begun in the Augustan era.

Josephus describes that Herod the Tetrarch founded the eponymous city in honor of the emperor (Ant. 18.36). It is likely that this occurred in AD 18 corresponding with Tiberias' sixtieth birthday as Avi-Yonah suggested (Avi-Yonah 1950: 160–169). The city is located near a village with hot springs Josephus calls Ammathus. It is situated between Tiberias and Gadara. In a glimpse into how such new foundations may have been populated by eastern provincial elites Josephus says Antipas forcibly relocated a 'questionable crowd' (sugkludes), which was not small and drawn from a combination of slaves, magistrates, and poor who were given houses and land but were henceforth bound to the new city. A majority of those relocated to Tiberias were Galileans he says. He also notes that, in transgression of Jewish custom, Antipas knowingly built the new city upon many tombs several which were destroyed by the massive building project. Tiberias went on to rival and surpass its Galilean sister-city Sepphoris in importance, aided in part by its very founding being traced to Antipas.

Tiberias was a regional urban center and force from the beginning. 1st century AD Tiberias had two free standing city gates, a monumental *cardo maximus*, along with various other monumental complexes such as a basilica

and theater adorning its the civic center, as well as a seaside stadium.<sup>2</sup> Agrippa famously entertained Kings from all over the region there (Ant. 19.338ff.). The impressive theater, now excavated, was built on the south-western side of the civic center at the foot of Mount Berenice.<sup>3</sup> Its diameter was 78m long and its height c. 40m. The theater could accommodate 5000-6000 spectators.<sup>4</sup> Based on the construction technique and pottery assemblage it can be dated to the early 1st century AD, shortly after the founding of the polis. The theater was renovated in the 2nd half of the 2nd century AD. In the process the stage and *scaenae frons* were also renovated, the *orchestra* was paved with limestone, and part of the perimeter wall was refurbished. Following the AD 363 earthquake the *media* and *suma cavea* of the theater collapsed and were subsequently dismantled. In the center of the surviving *ima cavea* a *tribune* was added. The stage was modified, the eastern wing of which was adorned with a mosaic floor. It seems that the smaller and remodeled post AD 363 theater was used as a public gathering space or auditorium from the late 4th century AD forward.

By the 3rd century Tiberias flourished as Jewish center of learning and administration with the Patriarchate, Sanhedrin and *bet ha-midrash ha-gadol* having located there. The Syrian-born Roman Emperor Elagabalus granted *Colonia* status to the city c. AD 220. According to Jerome, (*Chronicles*, 320.15), in the mid-4th century Tiberias, along with Diocaesaria (Sepphoris), nearby Sinnabra, Diospolis (Lod), and 'very many other towns' were destroyed as a result of Roman punishment during the Gallus revolt (AD 351–352). However, to date there is no archaeological indication of such reprisals.

Substantial monumental projects were also part of the Byzantine period development of Tiberias. This would

<sup>1</sup> The excavation of the Roman theater was directed by W. Atrash and A. Hilman with the participation of E. Amos and O. Zidan (area supervisor), Y. Kadosh (scientific recording), R. Mishayev, Y. Nemichnitzer, T. Meltzen (surveying, plans and figures drawing), M. Avisar, H. Abud and A. de Vincent (ceramics), G. Mazor (architectural décor analysis), R. Kool (numismatic), A. Lester (metal), A. Katlav (shells), Y. Gorin-Rosen (glass), L. Di Segni (inscriptions).

<sup>2</sup> For the Roman and Byzantine polis excavations see: Hartal 2008a; Hirschfeld 1991; 1882; Hirschfeld and Galor 2007; Miller 2017: 95–107.

<sup>3</sup> The theater was first revealed by Y. Hirschfeld (1991: 170–171) who exposed part of its eastern perimeter wall.

<sup>4</sup> For the theater excavation results see: Atrash 2010, 2012, 2019; Atrash and Mazor 2016.

include a city wall dating to the mid-6th century, it would seem also a growth in the number of synagogues in the city and nearby Hammat Tiberias occurred during this period. In this phase a bathhouse was built over the earlier Roman period bath, prominent Christian structures such as the so-called Anchor church on top of Mount Berenice, a monastery emerged, including a second church which also dates to the 6th century AD.<sup>5</sup>

In AD 635 Muslim troops led by Shurahbil ibn Hasana conquered al-Urdunn ‘by force,’ al-Baladhuri records, ‘except for Tabariyya, whose inhabitants came to terms.’ All the terms of the capitulation agreement, or *sulh*, the peace covenant, in the early Muslim historian’s account are not completely clear.<sup>6</sup> But it seems the religiously diverse population of the city were allowed to maintain their churches, (Jewish buildings are not mentioned explicitly but there is no reason to think those too were not part of the agreement) their homes, and safety for their families was guaranteed. Al-Baladhuri does mention that Shurahbil selected a special spot for a Mosque. The city was spared any destruction according to this account. Eventually Tabariyya was declared the capital of *Jund Urdunn*, thus replacing Nysa-Scythopolis, the capital of *Provincia Palaestina Secunda* (Avni 2011: 308; Sharon 1986: 117). At the center of the Islamic *Medina* a grand mosque was constructed (Cytryn-Silverman 2009: 37–61; 2012: 599–617), and along a paved street industrial installations, shops and houses were built. As a result of the AD 749 earthquake the theater was destroyed and gradually covered by an accumulation of layers.

Tabariyya was not spared the chaos of the mid 740’s in Bilad al-Shams when, as al-Tabari understates, ‘the unity of the Banu Marwan was disturbed.’ In AD 744 the Caliph Walid II was overthrown and killed. The events enflamed the third Umayyad *fitna*. Sulayman ibn Hisham, son of the late Caliph and an experienced General, led a contingent of his own personal army to Tabariyya to ensure the city supported Yazid III as Walid’s successor. When he arrived in Tabariyya Sulayman dispersed those who had come to the city from other regions, presumably looking for trouble, went to Sinnabra, gathered the people of Urdunn and led them in the *bay’a*, the public oath of allegiance, to Yazid III. The following day, Friday, Sulayman took a boat across the lake and returned to Tabariyya. There he led the people in prayer and administered the *bay’a*.<sup>7</sup> The ensuing year AD 744–745 brought a modicum of stability to Tabariyya and the region, however short-lived (Hawting 2000: 90ff).<sup>8</sup>

The year AD 750 witnessed the changing of the guard in the Islamic empire as the Abbasid central authority replaced the Umayyad Caliphate. Eventually the capital was moved from Dimashq to Bagdad. During the Abbasid period Tabariyya flourished and its territory

expanded from Hammat Tiberias in the south to the modern-day northern boundary of the city. Abbasid Tabariyya was considerably larger than the Roman-Byzantine *polis*. In the Fatimid period the vast city continued to flourish and functioned as a major commercial center for the region. The city was abandoned in the 11th century AD with just a small village remaining at the northern end of town.<sup>9</sup> What began with a sudden bang in the years of Herod Antipas ended with a whimper a millennium later.

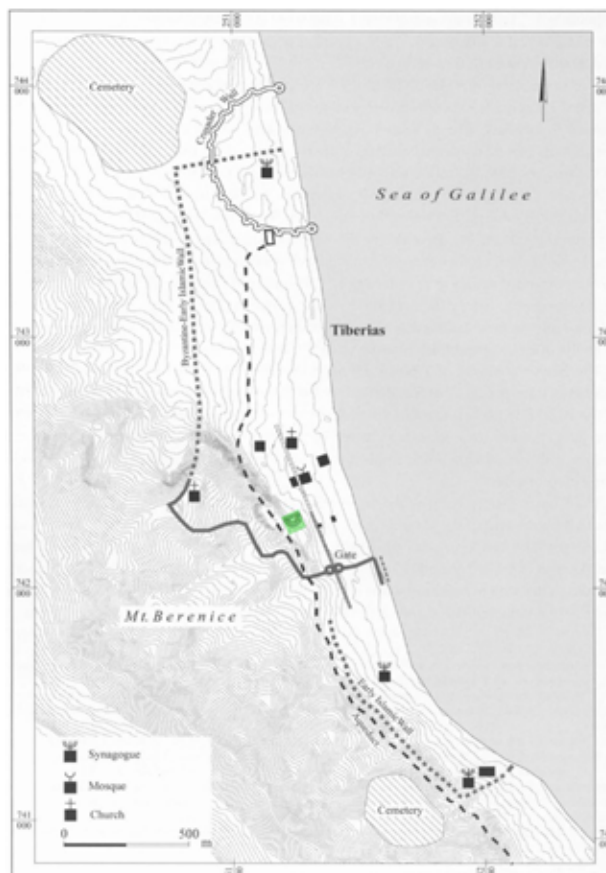


Figure 1. Tiberias. map of the early Islamic city (Avni 2011. Fig. 2).

### A Residential Quarter

A spacious residential quarter was established in the south-west portion of the civic center, at the foot of Mount Bernice along the *cardo maximus* in the early Abbasid period. Located c. 150m south-west of the grand mosque, (Stratum II, 9th-10th centuries AD), this residential area was inhabited along with minor changes in the Fatimid period (Stratum I, 10th-11th centuries AD; Figure 1). Over 20 houses, a street, various alleyways, water channels, wells and subterranean reservoirs were exposed (Figure 2) constructed over a c. 2m high accumulation soil-layer that covered the ruined theater.

<sup>5</sup> Cytryn-Silverman 2015, who provides a helpful and concise overview of the history and archaeology of the city.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmad ibn-Jabir al-Baladhuri, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*, chapter VI.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Tabari in Hillenbrand 1987: 183ff.

<sup>8</sup> provides some clarity for what was at the very least a fluid eighteen months.

<sup>9</sup> The early Islamic southern border of the city was revealed south of the synagogue of Hammat Tiberias (Vincent 1922) where courtyard houses and industrial installations were exposed (Hartal 2009; Onn and Weksler-Bdolah 2016; Oren 1971). Next to the southern city gate houses of the early Islamic period were revealed (Foerster 1997; Stacy 2004). At the northern part of the *Medina* a residential quarter was revealed (Hartal 2008b; 2013a, 2013b, 2013c).

The construction over earlier ruins of the AD 749 earthquake debris can be seen as well in houses that were excavated c. 300m to the north (Hirschfeld 2004: 3–26; Hirschfeld and Gutfeld 1999: 102; Mokary 2011).

The layout of the houses fits the mountain slope and debris layers of the theater (Figure 3). The courtyard houses are grand, mostly two stories high, well-constructed and preserved.

stone vessels, metal tools and reused architectural members.

### Street and alleys

The residential quarter is divided in the northern portion by a street. A c. 60m long section was exposed. This section runs in a west-east axis towards Mount Bernice, flanked by houses and shops. Its width varies (3–5m), and it is comprised of basalt stone pavers. Beneath the



Figure 2. Tabariyya. Plan of the residential quarter (plan: Tania Meltsen).

Their construction made good use of *spolia*, mainly masonry and architectural members as basalt bases and column shafts. Walls were preserved to the height of 1–3m they are 70cm wide and plastered. Rooms' floors were mostly of compressed soil, occasionally plastered and minor renovations of walls and floors indicate various strata II (Abbasid) and I (Fatimid). Some of the houses had a fountain or garden, various types of installations and a wide variety of coins, pottery, glass,

pavement are water channels. Some alleys and staircases extend from some of the houses to the main street. From the street a 4m wide alley (I) leads south toward a second elevated section of houses. From here two narrower alleys (II, III; 1.5m wide) extend to the east and the west. At its western extent, the main street ends at an alley (IV) running N–S. At its northwestern extent of this street there is an alley (V) that climbs the eastern slope of Mount Berenice to the Monastery Church at the summit.





Figure 3. Aerial view of the residential quarter above the remains of the Roman theater, looking south (Photo: Sky View).

At southern part of the residential quarter another alley (VI) runs E–W and leads to the additional housing complexes. The alleys characteristically are compressed soil surfaces beneath which water channels were uncovered. Houses in the quarter are of the courtyard type with only occasional modest variations.

#### House with a Fountain in its Courtyard (No. 1)

At the lower part of the residential quarter south of the main street and east of the main alley (I) is a courtyard house of the Abbasid period. It is one story high, has a vestibule, and a central grand court flanked on three sides by rooms. Its eastern part was severely destroyed by the earthquake of AD 1033 (Figure 4). The vestibule in the NE corner was entered on the westside via the main alley (I). The surface of this alley is paved with basalt stone slabs. It leads into a central rectangle courtyard the surface of which is comprised of small stones and compressed soil. In the SE corner of the courtyard is a tabun (D. 50cm). At the center of the court a hexagon nymphaeum was exposed. The nymphaeum floor is constructed of marble paving and the walls are plastered. At its base is a clay pipe (D. 9cm). Connected to this pipe are several vertical pipes (D. 4cm) which were set in the fountain's six corners. A drainage channel at the bottom returns the water in a constant cycle (Figure 5).<sup>10</sup> It seems



Figure 4. House (No. 1), looking south (Photo: Walid Atrash).

(Gorzalczny 2014: 49) including an octagonal one (Avni, Avisar, Baruch and Torga 2008: 18). A rectangle fountain of the Fatimid period with a marble floor and plastered walls, in which the water installation apparatus was well-preserved including a clay pipe and a container jar was found as well (Torgë, Haddad and Toueg 2016).

<sup>10</sup> Various types of fountains were revealed in houses of the Abbasid and Fatimid periods. In Ramla eight fountains were revealed



little effort was spared in adorning the residential quarter of Abbasid Tabariyya.

From the courtyard two rooms on the southside were entered through a wide entrance at the northern wall (Figure 6). One would pass through the first room and a door in order to enter the second room off the courtyard.



Figure 5. House (No. 1), the hexagon nymphaeum, Looking east (Photo: Walid Atrash).



Figure 6. Isometric reconstruction of house (No. 1) during the Abbasid period (drawn by Tania Meltsen).

To the east the remains of yet another room were poorly preserved. The floors of these rooms are made of compressed soil with occasional plastered.

During the Fatimid period the courtyard floor was renovated, and the fountain ceased to function. On the

eastside a rectangle plastered pool (87 x 80cm, 90cm deep) was set within the courtyard floor. On its façade a reused marble chancel-screen was integrated horizontally. A drainage channel at the bottom of the pool connects to the larger alley drainage system. At the rooms' façade an exedra was built and along its western wall is a bench. The exedra surface is paved by basalt stone pavers that are slightly higher than the courtyard floor. At the eastern side of the court a staircase leads to the house second floor (Figure 7).

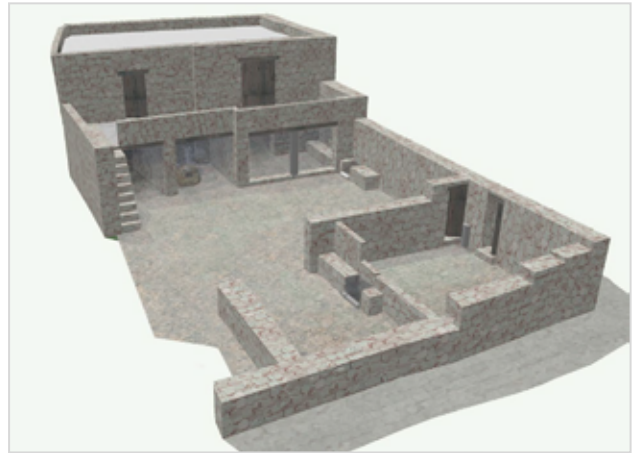


Figure 7. Isometric reconstruction of house (No. 1) during the Fatimid period (drawn by Tania Meltsen).

#### House with a Courtyard Garden (No. 2)

The square house of the Abbasid period (14.5 x 14m, 200sq. m; Figure 8) is located south of main street and west of the main alley (I). It was founded over the ruined stage house of the theater. The two storied house is of the courtyard type. The house entrance is along the eastern wall, and one enters from alley (III). The entrance opens to a rectangle vestibule from which the courtyard can be reached. The floor of this central courtyard is covered by basalt stone pavers and at its center is a square garden bordered by a carved stone balustrade. At the northside of the garden are two basalt stone column shaft drums that along with the exedra columns supported a roof. On the westside of the courtyard is a rectangle elevated installation, in the center of which is a plastered pool. Several marble chancel-screens and three small column fragments were integrated in the façade of the pool. North of this installation is a staircase that leading to the western section of the house. A second stairway provides access to the second floor (Figure 9).

Beyond this courtyard to the north is an elongated section of the house. Here cooking facilities and utensils were uncovered. The façade of this section of the house is comprised of two pilasters and columns which helped support the roof. A low balustrade delineated the courtyard from the house. At the NE corner of this section a tabun (D. 70cm) was excavated and south of this a rectangle cooking installation was uncovered (94 x 60cm). Nearby, at the NE corner of the house, is a square shaped latrine entered from the west and contiguous with the northern wing of the house. Adjacent to the SW corner of the latrine is a square-shaped installation made





*Figure 8. House (No. 2), looking south (Photo: Walid Atrash).*



*Figure 9. Isometric reconstruction of house (No. 2) during the Abbasid period (drawn by Tania Meltsen).*

of basalt stone masonry with a paved floor. Two of the floor pavers are higher than the latrine floor and in between is a sewage channel that also connects to the main drain under the street. Beyond the latrine to the

north a complete a jug placed over a marble column base was recovered (Figure 10).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In other houses of the Fatimid period at Tiberias no latrines were found, though it was not uncommon in the Fatimid period





Figure 10. House (No. 2): aerial view of the latrine  
(Photo: Walid Atrash).

On the southside of the central court and parallel to the house is an exedra with four basalt stone column drums 1.9-2.2m apart that support both a roof covering the ground floor as well as the upper balcony. From this exedra the four ground floor rooms were accessed as well

plastered pool with a marble and basalt stone platform. The two steps to enter the pool entrance are located at the eastern end of the façade.

During the Fatimid period the house was still used with minor changes. A storage room was added in the east and a new entrance to the house was erected at its northern wall that faces the main street. The rectangle storage room has a compressed soil floor, and, in the SW, corner is a round, plastered installation. At the outer face of the eastern wall of the house a clay pipe runs down from the roof to the main drainage channel under the alley. Entrance to the house is on northside. This entrance leads to the north wing of the house and to the latrine. The latrine walls have benches built from vertically set basalt stone slabs (Figure 11). The exedra was altered in this period by inserting rectangle shaped cells at both ends shortening its span. The entrance to one of the four rooms was blocked and put out of use. The connecting doors between other rooms were blocked as well and each room functioned individually. In various rooms rectangle installations were built over the floors and in one case under, including a round garbage pit.



Figure 11. Isometric reconstruction of house (No. 2) during the Fatimid period (drawn by Tania Meltsen).

as a staircase to the second floor. The ground floor rooms were set in a row with individual entrances cut into the façade wall. The floors of these rooms are of compressed soil and partly plastered. Along the eastern room wall is a 40cm high, 40cm wide basalt bench.

The eastern wing of the house has a staircase, a decorative plastered installation in the front and it is entered from the exedra. The steps of the staircase are basalt stone slabs. At the SW corner of the staircase podium is a tabun (D. 80cm). North of the steps is a

### Communal or Separated House (No. 3)

A rectangle house (142sq. m) of the Abbasid period is located at the western end of the main street, along the southern slope of Mount Berenice and west of house 2. The two-story house has a spacious central court surrounded on three sides by rooms (Figure 12). Its entrance along NW wall was reached from the main alley (IV). It led to an unusually shaped vestibule, the NE corner of which is a working platform finished with marble fragments and tiles. On the surface of this floor a gold earring in the shape of a rabbit was found. From the vestibule the central court was accessed. On the western side a staircase led to a balcony for the second-floor rooms (Figure 13).

architectural tradition. For example, in Fastat, (Egypt), four and five story high houses with latrines on every floor were found, connected by clay pipes to a drainage system that flowed to the Nile (Scanlon 1970: 188–194).



Figure 12. House (No. 3), looking east (Photo: Walid Atrash).



Figure 13. Isometric reconstruction of house (No. 3) during the Abbasid period (drawn by Tania Meltsen).

In the courtyard various cooking installations were found along with a tabun (D. 60cm) in the NE corner. The inner wall of the tabun is clay while the outside is composed of stones and mortar. On the southside of the courtyard a rectangle cooking stove was found. Immediately south of the courtyard is a small room. The exedra façade has two supporting pilasters, and its floor consists of basalt stone pavers. It is surrounded on three sides by rooms. The rooms off the cathedra on the south and north sides form a set of connected rooms or wings. The southern wing has four rooms. In the center of two of these rooms are basalt stone columns that support the roof. The northern wing are three rooms connected by doors. The northeastern room contained a tabun and in the adjacent room a rectangular installation was exposed. It seems reasonable to assume that two families occupied the two different wings and shared the common courtyard. In the Fatimid period the southern wing was abandoned.

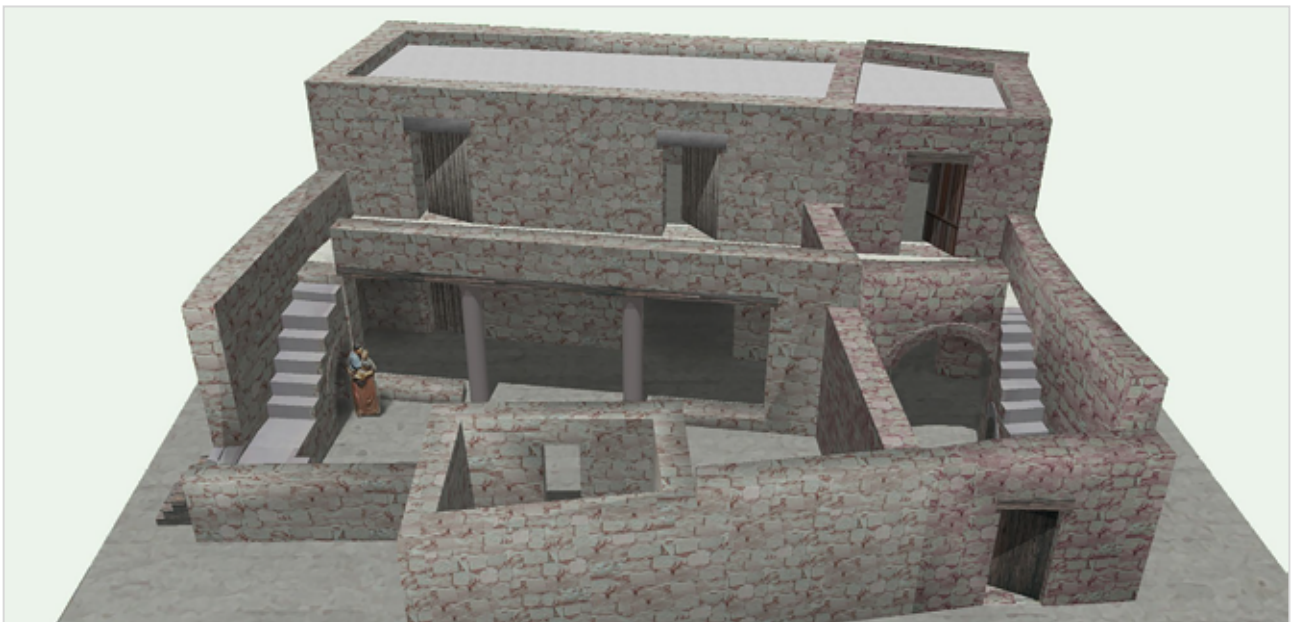


Figure 14. Isometric reconstruction of house (Nos. 6, 7) during the Abbasid period (drawn by Tania Meltsen).





*Figure 15. Aerial view of the houses (Nos. 6, 7) during the Fatimid period (Photo: Sky View).*



*Figure 16. Isometric reconstruction of houses (Nos. 6, 7) during the Fatimid period (drawn by Tania Meltsen).*



### A Divided House (Nos. 6 and 7)

An Abbasid period house south of alley (III) was constructed over the theater ima cavea. It is a two-story square house (186sq. m). Its entrance is at the far end of its northern wall. The threshold is constructed from a limestone column shaft. The entrance leads to a spacious courtyard with a storage room in the southern corner. Along the southern side of the courtyard is an exedra and entrances to three rooms. The exedra façade has three pilasters and two columns supporting the roof. At the SE corner of the exedra is a plastered pool while on the west side is a staircase that leads to the second-floor balcony (Figure 14).

In the Fatimid period the house was divided into two (Nos. 6 and 7). A wall was constructed in the courtyard also dividing it into eastern and western halves. The entrance to house No. 7 was closed off (Figure 15). House No. 6 is small, composed of a court, an exedra and one room at floor level. A staircase climbs to a balcony with two pilasters. At its south-western corner is a semicircle basalt stone-built cooking stove, the floor of which is plastered.

In the eastern half of the courtyard house no. 7 has a storage room, an exedra and two rooms. A new entrance was opened at NE corner of the courtyard that leads to alley (I). The elevation of the alley is higher than the courtyard, so a staircase was added. This staircase turns south and reaches up to a second-floor balcony (Figure 16). Each house then of the two houses had a separated

### Water Supply to the Residential Quarter

The Berenice aqueduct runs along the west side of the residential quarter and reaches a large reservoir at the center of the city. This sophisticated system supplied the city and residential quarter with the necessary water. This system could deliver water to the various installations and cisterns in individual homes in the quarter.<sup>12</sup> The rather large residential quarter required a substantial supply of water for daily life, the fountains, gardens, and domestic systems. Under houses Nos. 5, 9, 14, 16, and 20 several rectangular and one round cistern were uncovered set deeply within the ruins of the earlier Roman theater. The cistern in house No. 9 (1.9 x 1.9m, 4m deep) could hold 14 cubic m (Figure 17). The cisterns were constructed from masonry and were plastered. An arch at the center supported the roofs made of basalt slabs.<sup>13</sup> Plastered channels supplied water to the pools and captured water drained from the roofs of the Tabariyya homes.

Striking features of this replete water-system are the large number of installations, the many finely crafted basins and plastered pools, and the fact that virtually every home had plastered water installations, including a particularly grand fountain in one of the residences. They were constructed over and under the courtyard floors, reached by steps and accommodated with shelves. In house No. 9 a rich assemblage of pottery vessels including lamps, bowls and juglets (Figure 18) were found next to a pool.



Figure 17. Aerial view of the rectangle cisterns of water (Photo: Sky View).

staircase leading to a balcony and a second floor. The plastered pool at the south-eastern end of the exedra was replaced with a 90cm wide basalt shelf.

<sup>12</sup> For the Berenice aqueduct see Vinogradov 2002: 295–304.

<sup>13</sup> Subterranean rectangle cisterns are common in the Fatimid period houses at Tiberias (Hirschfeld 1990: 19). Similar cisterns were found in the Fatimid period houses at Caesarea (Raban and Arnon 2006: 191).

Houses had round sewage and garbage cisterns. The sewage cistern in house No. 5 also served house No. 4. It is rather small in circumference (60cm wide) and 5m deep. It is connected to the sewage channels of both houses. It seems that the entire sewage system was connected to the main *cloaca maxima* under the main street that served all houses while capturing drained rainwater from roofs as well.<sup>14</sup> Similar sewage and



Figure 18. House (No. 9): plastered installation with pottery, looking west (Photo: Walid Atrash).

garbage cisterns, though not as deep (1.2-1.6m), were found in houses in Lod and Caesarea as well.<sup>15</sup>

The food supplies of homes in the quarter were stored in jars, some of which were found beneath rooms and courtyard floors, as well as in dedicated storage rooms. Some jars were found sunken into floors as in the case of house No. 15 (Figure 19). Various houses storage rooms contained large jars as in the case in house No. 16. Such storage rooms contained, or perhaps even hid, material and belongings the inhabitants surely intended keep or at some point retrieve. For example, over the course of numerous seasons excavations recovered at least six hidden jars. One of the more celebrated cases was revealed in 1998 in a Fatimid house underneath an industrial installation room in which approximately one thousand bronze vessels were found (Brosh 1998: 1–9; Hirshfeld and Gutfeld 1999: 102–106; 2008: 20–30; Khamis and Amir 1999: 108–114).

### The Residential Quarter Founding and Destruction Dates

Pottery and coin assemblages date the founding era of the residential quarter to the early 9th century AD. Foundation layers revealed three gold dinars of the



Figure 19. House (No. 15): jar below the room floor level, looking south (Photo: Walid Atrash).



Figure 20. House (No. 9): A cache of 25 gold dinars (Photo: Walid Atrash).

Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid (AD 786–809) and a dinar of his son Abu Musa Muhammad al-Amin (AD 809–813). It would be reasonable to date the founding to the early years of Abu al-‘Abbas Abdallah al-Ma’mun (AD 813–833), the era of the Tulunids (AD 878–938) and Ikshidid (AD 938–970). Tabariyya’s status as a commercial and administrative center of the region was well established by the 9th century AD and the city’s economy and social status both appear to have flourished.

About 120 coins of the Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid periods were uncovered. In house No. 9 a cache of 25

<sup>14</sup> In streets and alleys of the Fatimid period at Tiberias water clay pipes and built channels were everywhere revealed (Hirschfeld and Gutfeld 1999: 102).

<sup>15</sup> For Tiberias see: Atrash 2010; Hartal 2008b, 2009, 2013a-c; Hirschfeld 2004: 17; Mokary 2011. For Caesarea and Lod see: Hadad 2020: 14\*; Raban and Armon 2006: 191.



gold dinars (Figure 20) was revealed, the latest coin of which is from the days of the Fatimid Caliph al-Aziz Billah (AD 975–996). Pottery and lamp assemblages were dated to the same era, glass vessels were dated to the Abbasid and Fatimid periods, the latest being dated to the early 11th century AD, resembling an assemblage found in a shipwreck at Serçe Limanı (Turkey) which dated to AD 1025.

The residential quarter was abandoned just prior to the AD 1033 earthquake and not resettled. The abandonment was the result of a complex reasons. In the early Fatimid era two rebellions took place, the first in AD 1011 under Caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (AD 996–1021) and the second in AD 1024 under Caliph al-Zahir Li-I'zaz Din Allah (AD 1021–1036). Shia presence and sentiment grew more pronounced in this period. Certain religious sites, such as the tomb (*Mashhad*) of Sukayna, the daughter of Imam al-Husayn b. Ali b. Abi Talib and granddaughter of Ali were dedicated.<sup>16</sup> The Persian traveler Nazir Khusraw in AD 1047 describes sacred sites and tombs in Tabariyya and surroundings that had become pilgrimage sites, like that of the tomb of Abu Hurairah, friend of Prophet (Le Strange 1980: 335). Khusraw recorded, 'when somebody visits the place, children raise their voices and commotion often ends with the throwing of stones that hurt (the pilgrims).'

A time of conflict in the southern Levant in the form of the dominance of Banu al-Jarrah and a period of Druse persecution or *mihna* in the area, for example, also contributed to the beginning of the decline of Tabariyya. Such social and religious tensions, including even occasional attacks on the madina itself, were coupled also with natural disasters (Gill 1997: 581–603). Three earthquakes in the immediate region correspond to the period of abandonment of the residential quarter. As a result, some upper-class members, including perhaps some of Tabariyya's Christian population,<sup>17</sup> and those who were able, elected to leave. Tabariyya lost its economic and commercial status and was transformed into a smaller, poorer community the remains of which are concentrated in the northern part of town (Hartal 2008a, 2013c).

### The Residential Quarter Inhabitants

The residents of the quarter were predominantly merchants. Al-Muqaddasī observes that agricultural and industrial products were crucial features of the larger commercial life of Bilād al-Shām. Tabariyya benefitted and was able to capitalize on this becoming a major commercial center of the region. Bone assemblages indicate, along with other finds, an active food industry like other towns like Baysān, Pela, Caesarea and Arsuf (Avni 2014: 35–106; Walmsley 1982: 136–139).

Imported ceramic vessels reflect the strong commercial ties with Syria, Egypt and Mesopotamia. Seashells originating from the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Nile and the Indian Ocean portray the same (table 1).

Mediterranean	Red Sea	Indo-Pacific	Nile
<i>Patella caerulea</i>	<i>Tricornis tricornis</i>	<i>Turbo marmoratus</i>	<i>Chambardia rubens</i>
<i>Naria spurca</i>	<i>Cypraea pantherina</i>		
<i>Charonia variegata</i>	<i>Monetaria moneta</i>		
<i>Bolinus brandaris</i>	<i>Mauritia arabica</i>		
<i>Hexaplex trunculus</i>	<i>Tridacna sp.</i>		
<i>Conus ventricosus</i>			
<i>Glycymeris bimaculata</i>			
<i>Glycymeris nummaria</i>			
<i>Ostrea edulis</i>			
<i>Cardites bicolor</i>			
<i>Acanthocardia tuberculata</i>			

Table 1: Species by geographical origin

Fine and refined bronze items reflect a luxury market for such ornamental items in Tabariyya. In house No. 3 evidence was found of metal melting and production. Weights of various sizes and shapes were found casting light on the Tabariyya trade. Small weights of just few grams were used for weighing dinars and dirhams.

They were marked with a circle and dot which was a customary convention in both the Byzantine and early Islamic periods (Figure 21). Tabariyya shared with other cities and capitals in the region, like Ramla, a market that reflected an economic stratum of the madina that had both the taste and capacity for luxury commodities such as heart shaped, square and round bronzes and similar lead weights (Tal 2008: 205–209).

Concerning the on-going discussion about the Byzantine-Islamic *transition* in Palestine Tabariyya is an important additional case. Certain that being made the Capital of *Jund al-Urdunn* in the Umayyad period was a considerable boon for Tabariyya and very likely at the expense of other nearby places like Nyssa-Scythopolis. Its proximity to two noted Umayyad palaces in Sinnabra to its south and Khirbat al Minya to its north, along with the bathhouse at Hammat-Gadar associated through a bilingual inscription with the Caliph Muawiya, highlights the fortunate and convenient location of early Islamic Tabariyya (Whitcomb 2016). But the city's location for broader trade proved prescient as overtime the commercial and political links between Damascus and Egypt grew in importance (Avni 2011).

The residential quarter discussed here does not shed direct material evidence on the Umayyad period of Tabariyya. However, when we look at this late antique transitional period in the city we do see, as Kennedy observed some time ago, that the process or transition

<sup>16</sup> Mashhad of Sukayna was rebuilt by the governor of Zefat and the Mamluk Bufor (Sharon 1986: 19).

<sup>17</sup> An alley mounting mount Bernice was revealed reaching the church at the summit (Hirschfeld 1993: 75–134). In the quarter excavations some pig bones and a basalt paver with a cross were found that might indicate that the inhabitants were Christians.





Figure 21. Residential quarter: Metal tools and weights (Photo: Klara Amit).



Figure 22. Isometric reconstruction of residential quarter (drawn by Tania Meltsen).

was more one of ‘continued development, rather than desertion and resettlement (Kennedy 2006: 12)’. Byzantine Tiberias experienced monumental growth and incorporated new religious and cultural developments and populations. This trend or momentum continued into the early Islamic period in Tabariyya. The city expanded. New religious communities and structures emerged. The

prosperity of early Islamic Tabariyya was an outcome of its administrative position, as Avni observed. By the 10th century AD, it was a much larger city in both area and population than in the Byzantine period (Avni: 2011: 308). But we see in the case of Tabariyya a building upon the structures and a framework, and even the cultural milieu, of the earlier *polis* in terms of a certain religious

diversity and political and commercial intercourse which seems to have largely prevailed. These aspects of the earlier city obtain in the *madīna* of Tabariyya and even expand. In the case of the residential quarter, in the early Abbasid period, we can now get a concrete grasp of a Tabariyya that is vibrant and successful, culturally and economically, and that is at the apex of a process that began even prior to the establishment of *Jund al-Urdunn*.

## Conclusions

Analyses of the archaeological picture of the residential quarter constructed over the ruins of the theater reveals a relatively high level of commercial activity and standard of living in this section of Tabariyya. The excavations and subsequent analysis of the finds have provided an opportunity to offer a reconstruction of a rather prosperous residential quarter that reached its peak at the early Fatimid period. Houses were of the courtyard houses type and although they may vary in size, they are faithful to the type (Figure 22). Most of them are two story high, a type which is in fact characteristic in the region since the Hellenistic period and remain common into the Byzantine and early Islamic periods. Household activities and day to day chores were conducted in the courtyard where many cooking facilities were found along with water, sewage and garbage installations. Some of the courtyards were richly adorned by a fountain or garden reflecting the economic status of their inhabitants.

These finds, and this attempt at a reconstruction of Abbasid and early Fatimid Tabariyya, provide a portrait of this *madīna* of al-Urdunn at its apogee. Tabariyya of the Abbasid period flourished. The rich assemblage of finds suggests a prosperity and lively commercial activity with markets both near and far. And to no surprise the religious and cultural institutions and buildings in the city reflect a concomitant vitality. In the late Fatimid period security conditions deteriorated and inhabitants started to leave Tabariyya. Following the AD 1033 earthquake the residential quarter lay in ruin and it was not rebuilt.

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# First Guidebooks to the 'Russian Palestine' From Sacral Journey Itinerary to Decision Maker's Tool and Advertising Mean

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*Russian pilgrimage literature has a long and rich tradition. The first books of Russian travelers to the Holy Land were descriptive and full of religious enthusiasm. However, none of these books was a practical guide for the traveler - literature of this kind was not yet necessary, since traveling to Holy Land was still the destiny of a few. Difficulties were associated with obtaining official travel permits from the Russian and Ottoman authorities, as well as with the high cost and irregularity of sea communication. A real revolution occurred when, after Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, the Russian government saw an increase in the number of Russian pilgrims as an effective way to restore its shaky authority in the Middle East. One of the main ways to achieve this goal was the creation of a guidebook to Holy Land that could satisfy the requirements of a wide range of Russian pilgrims. The further development of Russian language guides before the First World War reflected all the changes that had occurred in the organization and promotion of the Russian religious pilgrimage movement and echoed the evolution in the structure and composition of fast-growing tourism from the territory of the Russian Empire.*

KEYWORDS: RUSSIAN PALESTINE; GUIDEBOOK; HOLY LAND; RUSSIAN PILGRIM; JERUSALEM.

A small study of the first guidebooks to the Holy Land for Russian pilgrims, which was held by the authors for the 'Ariel' booklet led us to an important conclusion: the idea of creating a mass guide for the Russian-speaking pilgrim become one of the reasons led to creation of the phenomenon known today as 'Russian Palestine'.

In the spirit of this study, it is important to define the concept of 'guidebook' and to cite here several conceptual ideas of the 'guide' genre that are accepted in modern scientific literature. On our opinion, this clarification should help to understand our discussion about creating a real mass guide for the Russian pilgrim. A guidebook or travel guide is 'a book of information about a place designed for the use of visitors or tourists' (The New Oxford American Dictionary). According to the Great Russian Encyclopedia 'A guidebook is a short reference publication with a description of geographical, historical, artistic, and other information about the country, city, local attractions, routes of communication, etc., intended mainly for tourists' (Nagorsky and Frumin 2016).<sup>1</sup> It should include information on attractions, cultural information about the history of the object or legends associated with it, detailed route descriptions, accommodation, food, transportation, and activities. An important part of the guide should be maps of various details, hazard warnings, short phrasebook, and travel tips. Irina Rutsinskaya, a Russian researcher of the history of guidebooks, defines their main conception as follows: 'The main text accompanying the movement of a tourist/pilgrim is a guidebook. In the shortage of time for travel preparation, it is intended to replace dozens of books on history, geography, and culture of the region.

His task is to input a person in the space of a travel' (Rutsinskaya 2014: 204).

The predecessors of travel guides appeared in antiquity. It must be saying that the pilgrims' itineraries were along the time attributed to geographical writings and explored, respectively, geographically, distinguishing them from the land descriptions of that time, approximately as topography distinguish from geography, and, often, considering them as a geographical description of the Holy Land and its surroundings (Shlegel', Rukin and Mazur 2013: 19). But the process of global economic, political, cultural, and religious integration and unification is changing the requirements for this literary genre. Instead of descriptions of travels (itinerary), usually told in the first person and carrying a very personal emotional connotation, an impersonal narrative appears, carrying detailed information that should satisfy the interests of various categories of travelers. In Russia, guidebooks, both within the country and helping in organizing trips abroad, became widespread a little later than in Europe, mainly. The reasons for this delay were organically associated with the constraints of the socio-economic system of Russia (the feudal system), which was canceled only in 1861. Private travelers and pilgrims made up a small, insignificant part of the population of Russia. Interest in the Holy Land first arose in Rus' (ancient Russia) with the adoption of Christianity in the late 10th - early 11th centuries. As the new religion spread in the Eastern Slavic lands, Russian-speaking pilgrims began to travel to holy places. The first surviving description of such a journey made by Abbot Daniel dates to the early 12th century (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> Abbot Daniel visited the Holy Land soon after the end of the First Crusade and left an essential account of the formation stage of the First Latin kingdom of Jerusalem.

<sup>1</sup> 1998 Great Russian Encyclopedia.

<sup>2</sup> 1883. The Life and Pilgrimage of Daniil, Igumen of the Russian Land.

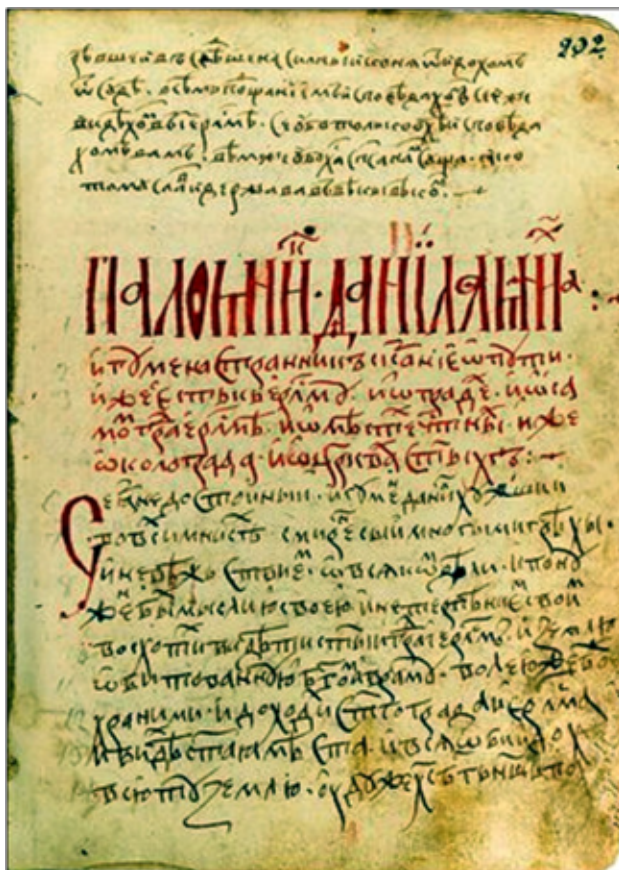


Figure 1. The page from 'The Life and Pilgrimage of Daniil' 12th century AD.

Abbot Daniel's book became the ancestor of a whole genre of ancient Russian literature called *khozhdeniya*, literally 'walks', - eyewitness itineraries, describing the holy places they visited. The genre became very popular among the readers. Pilgrim descriptions were repeatedly copied, preserved in monastic libraries, and formed a significant part of the repertoire of Russian literature of the 12th-17th centuries AD. Today more than 70 text belonging to this genre are known, of which about 50 can be regarded as historical sources, and the rest can be classified as legendary-apocryphal literature (Prokofiev 1975). Bishop Daniel, who visited the Holy Land soon after the First Crusade, left valuable information in his book about the formation of the First Latin Kingdom in Jerusalem.

The journeys of Russian-speaking pilgrims continued throughout the following centuries despite long distances, difficulties of the way, and permanent political changes, both in Eastern Europe and in the Middle East. There are written accounts of such travels, relating to Mamluk's rule Stefan from Novgorod, 14th century (Dmitriev 1999);<sup>3</sup> hieromonk Zosima, 15th,<sup>4</sup> the Ottomans Moscow merchant Trifon Korobeinikov, 16th century;<sup>5</sup> the monk

Arsenii Sukhanov, 17th century;<sup>6</sup> the monk Grigorovich-Barsky, first half of the 18th century (Grigorovich-Barsky 1885–1887; Figure 2). The travelers were usually people of religious rank or traders. Many of them were envoys of the authorities or church hierarchs (Guminsky 2008).



Figure 2. Titles and drawings from Russia itinerary books from the 15th - 18th centuries AD.



Figure 3. Andrey Muravyev, 'Journey to the Holy Places in 1830'.

The territorial expansion of the Russian Empire and the inclusion of the Black Sea coast into its territory, created a new situation in Russian-Turkish relations. The presence of the Russian fleet in the Mediterranean in the second half of the 18th century and in the early 19th century, during the Napoleonic wars, led to the appearance in the eastern Mediterranean of a new type of Russian travelers - educated and financially well-off noblemen.

<sup>3</sup> Khozdenie of Stephan from Novgorod.

<sup>4</sup> Hieromonk 1889 - In the Orthodox hierarchy it is a monk in the rank of pastor; Khozdenie of monk Zosima in 1419–1421.

<sup>5</sup> 1889. Khozdenie of Trifon Korobeinikov.

<sup>6</sup> 1889. Proskinitarii of Arsenii Sukhanov 1649–1653.



An emotional book by Andrey Muravyev, 'Journey to the Holy Places in 1830', published in 1832, aroused great interest in Russian society (Muraviev 1832; Figure 3). Soon, it was followed by a much more methodical work by Avraham Norov - 'Journey through the Holy Land in 1835', published in 1838 (Norov 1838; Figure 4).

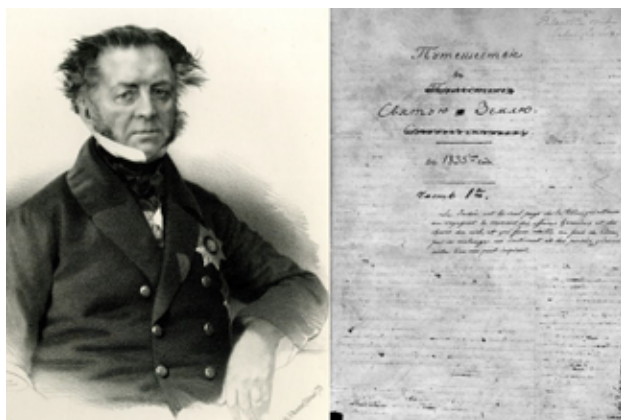


Figure 4. Avraham Norov, 'Journey through the Holy Land in 1835'.

However, none of these books was a practical guide for the traveler since there was no need in the literature of such kind while the journey to Palestine remained the privilege of a few.

According to Russian diplomats who served in Constantinople, the number of Russian pilgrims arriving in the Holy Land in the first half of the 19th century was between 100 and 250 a year.<sup>7</sup> The difficulties of the journey were aggravated both by problems of obtaining required official travel permits from the Russian and the Ottoman authorities and the high cost and irregularity of sea voyages, and tardiness and insecurity of the overland routes.

However, in the middle of the 19th century, the situation began to change rapidly. After the end of the second Turkish-Egyptian crisis, the Ottomans restored effective control over Syria and Palestine and started implementing Tanzimat reforms. Consequently, the road network was improved, the European powers extended their consular representation in the area (Bazili 1862), and the first steamship lines opened.

A turning point in the history of the Russian pilgrimage to the Holy Land was the emergence of the Russian Steam Navigation and Trading Company (ROPiT; Lisovoy 2015: 16; Tsiabkin 1987: 66–67; Womack 2013: 1–18), created in 1856 under the patronage of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich, who headed the Maritime Ministry. The creation of ROPiT, which received large

loans from the state, allowed Russia to develop the Black Sea's port infrastructure and prepare the necessary personnel for the new steam fleet.<sup>8</sup>

Despite its prime strategic importance and the highest patronage, ROPiT was a commercial structure. The increase in cargo and passenger traffic between the ports of the Black and Mediterranean Seas was necessary for the profitability of the steamship lines opened by the ROPiT. In the opinion of the leadership of ROPiT, the organization of a mass pilgrimage to the Holy Land could contribute significantly to achievement of this goal. The idea received full support of the Russian government, which saw the strengthening of the pilgrimage as an effective way to restore Russia's shattered authority in the Middle East (Kane 2015: 3; Lisovoy 2015: 1–24).

In November 1856, by order of Grand Duke Constantine and personal order of Tsar Alexander II, a young and energetic the Maritime Ministry official, Boris Mansurov (1829–1910; Figure 5), was sent to Jerusalem (Dmitrievsky 2010: 52; Mansurov 1857; Stavrou 1963: 41).<sup>9</sup>

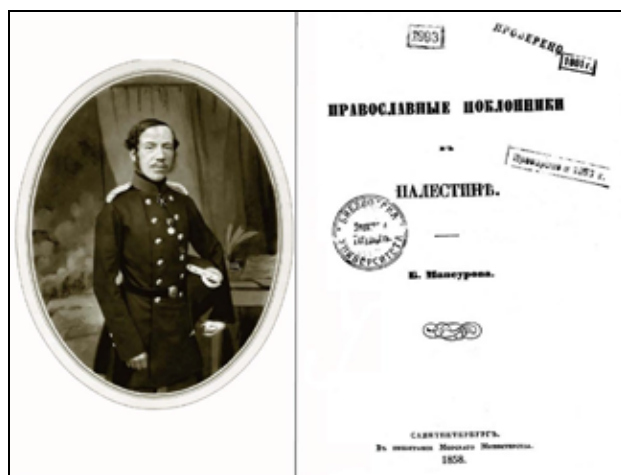


Figure 5. Boris Mansurov.

One of the primary purposes of his trip was to collect materials for compiling a guidebook to the Holy Land for a Russian pilgrim. The instructions received by Mansurov from Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich stated: 'The guide should include a map of the journey to the Holy Land, different routes there, a detailed description of the means of communication, accommodations, hotels, the list of persons whom it is possible to approach on the

<sup>7</sup> The widespread opinion that hundreds and thousands of Russian pilgrims visited Jerusalem during the Easter holidays until the middle of the 19th century requires careful study. Archival documents indicate a large number of Muslim and Jewish travelers compared to a large number of Christian pilgrims in the first half of the century: Kane 2005; Zhitenev 2012.

<sup>8</sup> According to the Treaty of Paris in 1856, which ended the Crimean War, the Black Sea was declared neutral. All Black Sea powers were forbidden to maintain a navy, naval arsenals and fortresses on the Black Sea. These restrictions, however, did not prevent the Ottoman Empire from building up its military fleet outside the Black Sea. In case of war, it could be quickly transferred from the Marmara and Mediterranean seas. Under these circumstances Russia chose to invest in creating of a civilian structure, allowed under the treaty, which could be repurposed, if necessary, for military usage.

<sup>9</sup> On the activities of Boris Mansurov see also: Carmel 1995: 59–60; Hopwood 1969: 56–61.

spot, the evaluation of the time required for moving, and the general tariffs for transfer, accommodations and life supplies so that every Russian could calculate with the help of this book, what the named journey would require from him according to the needs of the social class to which he belongs. It is desirable to supplement the book with brief historical and statistical information following the example of foreign 'Guides de voyageurs'...'.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 6. Map of transport infrastructure created for Russian pilgrims, existing till the First World War.

Combination of cartographic sources: Map from A. Eliseev's book 'Guide to the Holy Land' 1888. Roadmap of the Russian Empire 1916, fifth edition. Department of Transport.

However, realizing fully the enormous impact that a guide might have on the pilgrimage's intensification, Mansurov, having familiarized himself with the state of affairs in Palestine, found the publication of such a book premature. 'The result of the examination of the life of our worshippers in the Orient,' he wrote, 'very naturally led to the conclusion that neither our government nor the Steam Navigation and Trading Company should not yet undertake the publication of a national guide to the holy places. Such a book, if successful, may cause the development of pilgrimage to Palestine and increase its scope to a large extent... It would be unfair, just due to the monetary calculations of the Company, to encourage ordinary people to pilgrimage, because numerous of them may zealously respond to such calls, without having any

idea of the tremendous difficulties which expect them during the trip. Likewise, an individual should not publish a book encouraging pilgrimage when he knows that nothing is prepared for Russian worshippers in Palestine and that a devout mood alone is not enough to sustain spiritual and bodily strength for a long time' (Mansurov 1858: 110–111). Grand Duke Konstantin agreed with Mansurov's conclusions<sup>11</sup> and postponed the guidebook's publication until the existing situation is improved.

As a short-term solution for the problem, private houses were rented to accommodate pilgrims. The search and acquisition of land to construct Russian compounds for pilgrims' accommodation began. In the meantime, absence of mass passenger traffic continued to influence the ROPiT profits and plans. For instance, in 1857, ROPiT opened a steamship service on the 'Alexandria Line' on the route: Odessa - Constantinople - Athos - Smyrna - Rhodes - Alexandretta - Beirut - Jaffa - Alexandria (Figure 6). The initial goal was to operate three scheduled voyages per month on this route.<sup>12</sup> However, due to low passenger traffic, this frequency was not achieved even after five years of operation. In 1864, the ROPiT steamers on the line went only once every two weeks.<sup>13</sup>

As the construction of the Russian compound progressed, the idea of preparing a guidebook as a useful tool to attract pilgrims regained its relevance once again. In the spring of 1861, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich proposed to hieromonk Leonid (Kavelin), who used to stay in Jerusalem as part of the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission in 1857–59, 'to make something like a guidebook for Russian worshippers in the Holy City' (Kavelin 2008).

For this purpose, preparations for Father Leonid's field trip<sup>14</sup> started, however, in the end, the planned voyage did not take place. Later, Father Leonid spent two years in the Holy Land as the Head of the Russian Orthodox Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem (1863–1865) and apparently took the advice to write a book for Russian worshippers quite seriously.

Kavelin's 'Notes of the Pilgrim Monk' firstly appeared as separate chapters in the magazine 'Soul Beneficial Reading' (1870–1872), and in 1873 these chapters were

<sup>11</sup> As a result of Mansurov's report, the Maritime Ministry created in 1859 the Palestinian Committee Office. Mansurov was appointed its managing director and contributed greatly to building infrastructure for the pilgrims' accommodation. The Palestinian Committee was a non-governmental organization established in 1859 to regulate the activities of Russian charitable organizations providing assistance to Orthodox pilgrims in the Holy Land. The activities of the Palestinian Committee have been studied in detail by the Russian historian Nikolai Lisovoi; see: Lisovoy 2006: 109–119.

<sup>12</sup> 1856. *The Charter of the Russian Society of Shipping and Trade*: 3–4.

<sup>13</sup> 1865. *Explanatory note to the report of the Russian Society of Shipping and Trade*, 1864.

<sup>14</sup> Avraham Norov was also expected to take part in this voyage. Personal Communication (We would like to say our sincere gratitude to Cyril Vakh, historian and director of the publishing house 'Indrik' for the materials provided for writing this article).

<sup>10</sup> RGA VMF, Folder 410, File 2, Accession 13.

collected in the book 'Old Jerusalem and its surroundings' (Kavelin 2008: 12). (Figure 7) Despite the title, the book contains information about several other cities - Jaffa, Bethlehem, Hebron, Nazareth, Tiberias. However, particular attention farther Leonid devoted to Jerusalem. In addition to the traditional listings of the holy places and their detailed descriptions, the book also provides information about the population composition, various religious denominations in the city, their activities, and relationships. The author describes the most important roads and suggests several day-long trips in Jerusalem and nearby, provides detailed information regarding the everyday life of pilgrims. Nevertheless, even though the book has a lot of practical advice, descriptions of routes, and other useful information for travelers, it is still not a guidebook in the true meaning of the term. Kavelin's narration is full of personal experiences, reflections, emotional appeals to readers, scenes from the everyday life of Jerusalem, all in accordance with the best traditions of the Russian pilgrimage literature.



Figure 7. Father Leonid (Kavelin), 'Old Jerusalem and its vicinities'.

In 1862 Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich left the Maritime Ministry for another appointment.<sup>15</sup> Despite the disappearance of the main mastermind behind the guidebook's creation, ROPiT did not drop the idea. In the same year, the Company approached the famous Russian journalist Nikolai Vasilyevich Berg, who had already published a series of essays about his Middle East journey. ROPiT provided the author with an opportunity to personally acquaint himself with the new Russian buildings in Jerusalem and the houses hired for pilgrims in Jaffa, Haifa, and Nazareth (Carmel 1995: 60; Hopwood 1969: 71, 92–95).

In mid-1863, 'The Guide to Jerusalem and its surroundings' written by Berg appeared on the shelves of bookstores in major cities of the Russian Empire (Berg 1863). (Figure 8) Following the European standards in

form<sup>16</sup>, the guide had significant differences in content. First, intended for the Russian Orthodox reader, the guidebook offered a list of places to visit different from Western publications. Besides, in the descriptions and explanations of the significance of certain holy places, the author relied, first, on Orthodox traditions, often significantly different from Catholic and Protestant ones.

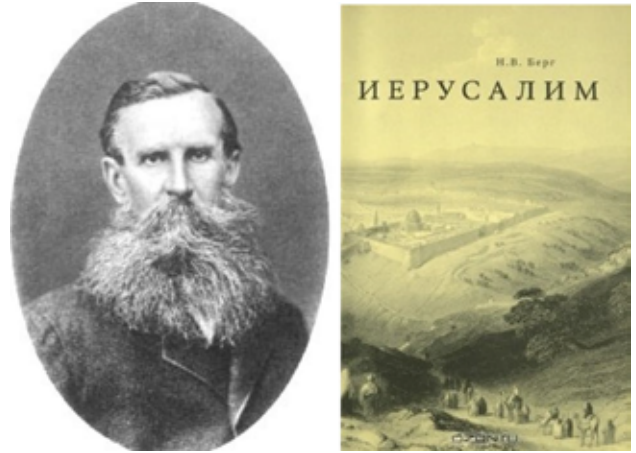


Figure 8. Nikolai Berg, 'Guide to Jerusalem and its close vicinities'.

However, being drawn from the examples of modern European guidebooks, Berg's guidebook was addressed, first, to representatives of the upper and middle classes of Russian society, i.e., those who usually traveled alone. Such a guidebook was not suitable for ordinary people, who usually traveled in groups. These low classes worshippers made up the bulk (9/10) of passengers, according to the reports of ROPiT.<sup>17</sup>

	1st class	2nd class	3rd class	4th class	Total
1862	617	791	220	22418	24046
1864	698	1407	76	27298	29479

In 1871 the restrictions imposed on Russia under the Treaty of Paris regarding the navy's maintenance in the Black Sea were finally lifted. As a result, the state's involvement in the ROPiT affairs dropped drastically. Further development of the pilgrimage infrastructure in Palestine got removed from the Steamship Company's sphere of interest, although it remained one of the main Russian transport companies until the outbreak of World War I.

It should be noted that along with the guidebooks written by direct or indirect order of the ROPiT, since the early 1860s, others have appeared where pilgrimage to the

<sup>16</sup> For instance: Baedeker 1856; Murray 1858; Schiller and HaKohen 2016: 51–56.

<sup>17</sup> 4th class is for the simple passengers; 1863. *Explanatory note to the report of the Russian Society of Shipping and Trade, 1862*; 1865. *Explanatory note to the report of the Russian Society of Shipping and Trade, 1864*, St. Petersburg.

<sup>15</sup> Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich was appointed governor of the Kingdom of Poland.



Christian East was not limited to the borders of the Holy Land (Figure 9).



Figure 9. First pages of guidebooks to the Holy places of the Middle East.

The scope of the Christian Orient is much broader than the Holy Land. The Russian language guidebooks with wider geographical content started to appear in the early 1860-s as a commercial initiative of Orthodox monasteries on the Holy Mount Athos.<sup>18</sup> The authors of these guidebooks were Russian-speaking residents of various monasteries there. Their proposed pilgrimage routes to the Orthodox places of the Eastern Mediterranean relied on the ports of entry of all available regular steamship lines.

In addition to the shrines of Mount Athos, Holy Land, and Jerusalem, some guidebooks also included descriptions of the Christian shrines of Asia Minor (near Smyrna), Cyprus, Sinai, and Egypt. The starting point for these routes usually was in Constantinople - the main transition port on the way from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean.

Hieromonk Pakhomiy, the author of a guidebook published in the name of the Ilyinsky monastery on Mt. Athos, explained to his readers: *'From Constantinople in all directions ceaselessly fussing steamships - some to Odessa, across the Black Sea, others, to the Athos Mountain, to Macedonia and beyond, others yet - to the shores of Syria and Palestine, to Jaffa and further to Alexandria, which is in the Egyptian country'* (Hieromonk Pahomius 1864).

Multiple reprints testify to the high demand for such guidebooks. Written by respected religious authorities (monks-elders), they were reproduced from year to year with minimal changes, though with constant clarifications regarding the timetable for steamboats, ticket fares, etc. For example, *'Guide to the holy city of Jerusalem to the Holy Sepulcher and other holy places of the East, and to Sinai'*, written by Hieromonk Arseny (Minin) in the name

of the Athos Russian Panteleimon Monastery, withstood eight reprints in thirty-four years (Arsenii (Minin) 1904).

A new page in the development of Russian pilgrimage to Palestine is associated with the creation in 1880 of the public organization Orthodox Palestine Society (since 1882, the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society). One of the main tasks of the IPPO was to organize a publicly accessible mass pilgrimage. The port of Odessa became the starting point of the IPPO pilgrimage routes. The development of railroads in the European part of Russia made it possible to significantly reduce both the time it took to bring pilgrims from various regions of Russia to Odessa and the costs: the IPPO, through its network of regional branches, provided pilgrims with tickets at subsidized prices (Figure 10; Carmel 1995; Lisovoi 2007: 3-22; Tsibkin 1987). The character of the pilgrims also changed. Social changes in Russia - the abolition of serfdom and the ensuing rapid



Figure 10. Pilgrimage ticket of the Russian Society of Shipping and Trade. Odessa - Jaffa and back.

growth of capitalism, the spread of literacy, all this led to the emergence of great number of readers among the common people. In accordance with the increased demand, the amount of literature about the Holy Land in Russian also increased. In the almanacs of the IPPO, both medieval and modern descriptions of journeys to the Holy Places were issued. Since 1885 in St. Petersburg a private journal *'Russian Pilgrim'* appeared. It was a commercial success and printed guidebooks on its pages. Some of them were subsequently published in separate books, such as the *'Guide to the Holy Land'* by the famous traveller, military doctor Alexander Vasilyevich Eliseev (1858–1895).<sup>19</sup>

An experienced traveller and explorer, Eliseev visited the Middle East several times<sup>20</sup>. In 1886, on behalf of the IPPO, he, incognito, made walking trip with a group of

<sup>19</sup> Eliseev, who traveled extensively around the world, has since 1878 published descriptions of his travels in the Russian press: Eliseev 1888.

<sup>20</sup> The first voyage to Egypt, Palestine and Syria took place in 1882–1881. In 1884 Eliseev visited Palestine again, and from there traveled through Greece and Sicily to Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and the Sahara. In 1886, during a trip to Asia Minor, at the request of the Palestinian Orthodox Society, he collected material for a new guidebook to the Holy Land.

<sup>18</sup> Mount Athos shrines had long attracted the Orthodox pilgrims and there were also specialized guidebooks dedicated only to this region.

pilgrims consisting of common people. As a result of this trip, he published a report on the shortcomings of the places of reception and accommodation for the pilgrims (Eliseev 1888: 127). Having such a varied experience, Eliseev thought of creating a universal guide for all classes of society, where 'both the common people and the educated and well-to-do will equally find ... the information and instructions they need'. Taking the guidebook of the Franciscan monk Liévin de Hamme<sup>21</sup> as a basis, Eliseev adapted it to 'the concepts and needs of the Russian Orthodox pilgrim'. For this purpose, he used the popular books by Muravyov, Norov, and drew on Professor Olesnitsky's then the most modern monumental study 'Terra Santa'.<sup>22</sup> Eliseev's guidebook, unlike most previous ones, contains almost no descriptions of holy places, which were already abundant, but gives brief data about their history and contains much useful information necessary for planning a trip. The book opened with an introductory chapter about preparing for the trip, discussing advantages and disadvantages of traveling alone or in groups, hiring guides, and the best time of the year for the trip. Also, the author indicated the minimum time needed to see certain places and routes. For example, the journey from Jerusalem to the place of baptism on the Jordan River, through the Holy Lavra of Saint Sabbas (Mar Saba) and the Dead Sea, with a visit to Mount of Temptation and back, according to Eliseev, would take three days. Eliseev details the bureaucratic procedures involved in obtaining a visa and a passport, gives a list of necessary and useful things for a traveller. The next section acquaints the future traveller with the geographical location, nature, climate, and history of the Holy Land. Information about the population, administrative divisions, religion, and local money was provided separately. Further chapters contained descriptions of various parts of the route: from Odessa to Jaffa, from Jaffa to Jerusalem, etc., as well as the information about the Russian buildings in Jerusalem. The guidebook included a map of roads from Jaffa to Jerusalem made by Eliseev himself, a 'Relief Map of Palestine'<sup>23</sup> (Figure 11) (borrowed from Kretschmar, Eduard, *Das Heilige Land aus der Vogelschau*, Leipzig, 1849), and a map of steamship traffic between Russia and the Holy Land. The guide also included a brief Russian-Arabic dictionary and phrasebook.

The number of Russian pilgrims and travelers to the Holy Land continued to grow throughout the period before World War I. The constant demand led to numerous reprints of old guidebooks and the appearance of new ones, vastly different in their coverage of territory, degree of detail, and aimed at different target audiences in terms of religion and income levels. Former pilgrims and

publishers alike initiated the creation of new guides, published both in capital and in provinces. Some were motivated by a sense of religious duty, others by commercial gain. The development of color printing techniques (chromolithography) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries made guidebooks more colorful, although often the illustrations and maps used, copied from foreign sources, were largely outdated.

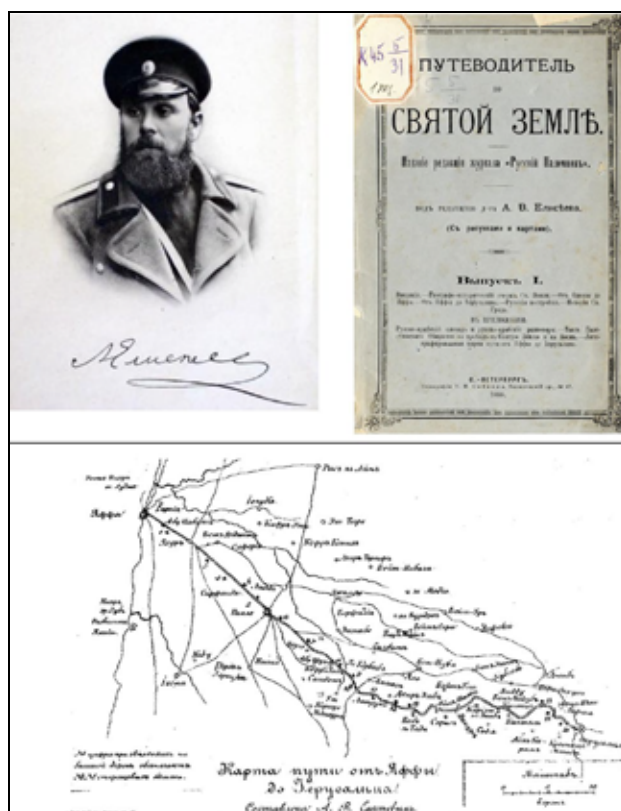


Figure 11. Alexander Eliseev, 'Holy Land Guide' and a map of the route from Jaffa to Jerusalem with the marking of guard towers.

Speaking of guidebooks in Russian, we cannot avoid mentioning one, which was unusual because of its target audience - 'A Short Guide to Palestine for Jewish Tourists', published in 1911 (Figure 12)<sup>24</sup> in Vilna by the publishing house 'Kadima'. The publication was a translation of the guidebook of the World Zionist Organization's (WZO) (ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית) in Vienna and was based on the information compiled by the 'Jaffa Information Bureau' (המשדד הארצישראלי). In addition to the traditional route for travelers from Russia through Odessa, the guide offered alternative options: through Trieste, Constanta, Genoa, Marseille and Constantinople. Like the IPPO, the WSO made a deal with ROPIT and other steamship companies and gave its travelers considerable discounts on fares.

The proposed itineraries of the trips were designed to acquaint the Jewish travelers first with the Jewish colonies of Palestine, from Castania in the south, to

<sup>21</sup> The guide of the Franciscan monk Liévin de Hamme (from Belgium) appeared in the first edition in 1869 and in the second edition in 1876 (Louvain and Lefever) and was a great success. This guide was intended for Christian pilgrims and was different from others in the systematic and thorough construction. Liévin de Hamme 1869.

<sup>22</sup> Akim Olesnitsky has visited the Holy Land several times and authored books on history, archeology and ancient manuscripts: Olesnitsky 1875–1876, 1895.

<sup>23</sup> The Russian version of the map in Eliseev's book was based on the original map of Eduard Kretschmar 1849.

<sup>24</sup> 1911. *Short Guidebook for Jewish Tourists*.

Metula in the north. Depending on the time available to the traveler, the guidebook offered a variety of travel options ranging from four to six weeks. It is noteworthy that the creators of this guidebook excluded Saturdays<sup>25</sup> from the travel schedule (with rainy days being equal to Saturdays).



Figure 12. The Short Guidebook for Jewish Tourists.

With the outbreak of World War I, all communication between the Russian Empire and the Holy Land, which was part of the Ottoman Empire, was cut off. The historical events that followed led to the cessation of pilgrimages from Russia. For almost a hundred years, there was no need in guidebooks in Russian. Interest in this kind of literature revived only in the beginning of the 21st century.

The short study of the history of the guidebooks to the Holy Land in Russian reflects the profound structural changes that took place in the Russian society in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The idea of creating the first guidebook resulted from the initiative of the high-level state officials of the Russian Empire. Such direct governmental involvement in the process of guidebook production is unique and incomparable with any other nation in the 19th century.

The preparatory phase of the publication, including the collection of relevant local information, unexpectedly led to long-term consequences. The thorough inspection by Boris Mansurov of the Holy Land's existing reality and his honest report of the situation on the ground made the authorities recognize the urgent need to develop an extensive infrastructure for receiving Russian travellers before instigating a mass pilgrimage. As a result, the rapid development of the cultural and ideological phenomenon known at present as 'Russian Palestine' started.

'Russian Palestine is not only a unique phenomenon, which materially consists of a complex structure of Russian churches, monasteries, plots of land and outbuildings, not only a system of some or other churches

and secular institutions – it is one of the largest and most vital national projects in Russian history' (Carmel 1995: 48; Frary 2013: 150; Lisovoy 2015: 5). The idea of using a mass pilgrimage from Russia to return and strengthen the Russian presence in the Holy Land after Russia's defeat in the Crimean War came together with the centuries-old self-identification of Russia as the heiress of Byzantium in the Holy Land.

The development of sophisticated infrastructure provides an influx of pilgrims that was growing from year to year, and this, in turn, led to the expansion of the infrastructure itself. Along with these processes, the propaganda literature inevitably became more diverse, covering a variety of topics: sacred history, pilgrimages to Jerusalem, especially of Russians, sacred geography and the way to Palestine, the current state of the Holy Land, the presence of other countries and faiths in the region, etc.,

Besides the guidebooks in Russian, written and published on behalf of the Russian state-associated or public organizations, other guidebooks were issued in Russian by different foreign structures operating on the Russian market. In the beginning Mt. Athos monasteries led this trend. Later, other monasteries, trying to attract at least part of pilgrims' traffic to themselves, introduced their own guidebooks with the broader itinerary.

The wide circulation of guidebooks in Russian, their growing diversity, and in particular, the appearance of unusual guidebooks for different Russian-speaking groups shows that publishing such literature on the eve of World War I became a commercially profitable undertaking, and not just religious or politically motivated content.

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<sup>25</sup> 1911. *Short Guidebook for Jewish Tourists*: 44.



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